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ABSTRACT

This paper is the result of an intensive case study by an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) review team, whose purpose was to investigate early childhood education and care (ECEC) in the United States, 1 of 12 countries participating in the OECD review between 1998 and 2000. The paper draws on information provided by a U.S. Department of Education background report, formal and informal discussions, document analysis, literature surveys, and observations of the review team. The paper's introductory chapter outlines the rationale of the OECD review and describes the goals and framework of the review visit and the paper. The remaining chapters are: (1) "Major ECEC Policy Priorities in the USA: A Brief Overview"; (2) "Contextual Issues Shaping ECEC Policies in the USA"; (3) "Current ECEC Policy and Provision in the USA"; (4) "Issues Arising from the Review Visit"; and (5) "Policy Implications from a Review Team Perspective." The paper's appendices present review team members, information on the U.S. background report, and a program of the review visit. (Contains 28 references.) (EV)

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OECD Country Note

Early Childhood Education and Care Policy

in

The United States of America

July 2000

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In memory of Mary L. Culkin

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purposes of the OECD Thematic Review

1. This Country Note for the United States of America is an output of the OECD *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*. The review project was launched by the OECD's Education Committee in March 1998 following the 1996 Ministerial meeting on *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All*. In their communiqué, the Education Ministers of the OECD member countries assigned a high priority to the goals of improving access to early childhood education and care, and of improving the quality of early childhood provision (OECD, 1996). In partnership with families, both are central aspects of strengthening the foundations of lifelong learning. The goal of the review is to provide cross-national information to improve policy-making in early childhood education and care in all OECD countries.[1]

2. The USA is one of 12 countries participating in the review between 1998 and 2000. The other countries are Australia, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. These countries provide a diverse range of social, economic and political contexts, as well as varied policy approaches towards the education and care of young children.

3. The scope of the review covers children from birth to compulsory school age, including the transition to primary schooling. In order to analyse what children experience in the first years of life, the review has adopted a broad, holistic approach. Not only are early childhood policy and provision the focus of the study, but consideration is also given to the roles of families, communities and other contextual factors influencing children's early learning and development. In particular, the review is investigating concerns about *quality*, *access* and *equity*, with an emphasis on policy development in the following areas: regulation; staffing; programme content and implementation; family engagement and support; funding and financing.

4. As part of the review process, each country hosts a review team for an intensive case study visit. After each country visit, the OECD produces a short Country Note that draws together background materials and the review team's observations. The present report for the USA will be one input into the final OECD Comparative Report that will provide a review and analysis of ECEC (early childhood education and care) policy in all 12 countries participating in the review.

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1. A detailed description of the review's objectives, analytical framework, and methodology is provided in OECD (1998).

Review procedure in the USA

5. The USA was the sixth country to be visited in the review. Prior to the visit, a Background Report on ECEC policy in the USA was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). Guided by a common framework that has been accepted by all participating countries, the Background Report provides a concise overview of the country context, major issues and concerns, distinctive ECEC policies and provision, innovative approaches, and available evaluation data. The Background Reports are an important output of the review process, providing a state-of-the-art analysis of policy and provision in each participating country.

6. After analysis of the Background Report and other relevant documents, a review team comprising an OECD Secretariat member and three experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (see Appendix I) visited the USA from 26 September to 8 October 1999. The two-week visit was co-ordinated by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) in co-operation with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and the Head Start Bureau. During the course of the visit, the team met with many of the major actors involved in ECEC policy and practice in three different states—Colorado, North Carolina, and Ohio—and with representatives from federal government departments and national professional organisations in Washington DC. The team also had the opportunity to observe numerous examples of early childhood programmes and services for children aged 0 to 6 years in Colorado, North Carolina, and Ohio (see Appendix III).

7. Obviously, in a 50-state country the size of the U.S., and for logistic reasons, a selection of states to be visited had to be made. The co-ordinating federal government department, guided by a steering committee of experts, chose the above-mentioned states not only because they represent different socio-geographical areas, but also because each has different examples of innovative collaborations and policy-making, which may be helpful for generally moving the policy debate forward. The OECD team used the experience and knowledge gained from talks and observations in these three states as a framework for reflecting on ECEC in the U.S. as a whole.

8. Discussions during the review visit revolved around six main issues:

- the overall context of ECEC; current policy concerns at the federal, state and community levels; policy initiatives addressing these concerns;
- the roles of federal government, state governments, local agencies, private enterprise, NGOs and other social partners in the funding, planning and implementation of ECEC policies;
- ECEC initiatives in the context of related policy issues (family, health, employment, welfare, social policies);
- infrastructure issues concerning the sustainability, impact, coherence and effectiveness of different approaches;
- innovative policies and practices, and their potential for replication;
- existing and desirable support structures for the improvement of ECEC policy-making, implementation, staffing, research and evaluation

Structure of the Country Note

9. The Country Note presents both a description and the review team's analyses of key policy issues related to ECEC in the USA. It draws upon information provided in the Background Report, formal and informal discussions, document analysis, literature surveys and the observations of the review team.

10. The Country Note is structured as follows:

- *Chapter 1*: this present introductory chapter, outlines the rationale of the OECD Thematic Review and describes the goals and framework of the review visit and the Country Note.
- *Chapter 2*: *Major ECEC policy concerns in the USA* leads the reader into current policy priorities.
- *Chapter 3: Contextual issues shaping ECEC policies in the USA* describes central influences on the development of early childhood education and care policies: demographic developments, the labour market and employment situation, related policy areas, economic factors, and governance.
- *Chapter 4: Current ECEC policy and provision in the USA* describes the broad structure of the system: the forms of provision, access, funding, regulation, and staffing. It also describes some recent policy initiatives at the state and local/community level.
- *Chapter 5: Issues arising from the review visit* outlines five broad issues related to ECEC policy and practice that were identified by the reviewers during the course of their visit in the USA: (1) responsibility of federal and state government for ECEC policy goals and implementation; (2) diverse provision, regulation and funding of early childhood education and care; (3) quality improvement, innovation and research; (4) access to early childhood services; and (5) staffing, staff training and professional development. In conclusion, some perceived 'gaps' in present policy discussions are outlined.
- *Chapter 6: Policy implications: A review team perspective* opens with a consideration of some strengths and weaknesses of U.S. policies and practices from an OECD team viewpoint, and concludes by presenting a number of suggestions for policy goal-setting which U.S. policy makers may wish to include in their discussions of early childhood education and care.

Acknowledgements

11. The review team would like to express their profound thanks to all those involved at the federal, state and local level in the preparation, co-ordination and implementation of the comprehensive review programme. The Background Report[2] provided us with invaluable research-based details and trend evaluations, the meetings with extensive insights into current policy goals, management and initiatives, and the site visits with memorable impressions and encounters with children, staff and providers. Without exception, the meetings and visits took place in an open, friendly and informative atmosphere very much valued by the reviewers. We also appreciated the detailed documentation that each group provided.

2. The review team worked with a 1999 draft of the Background Report. The complete report will appear as an edited volume in 2000, published by the U.S. Department of Education.

12. The analyses and suggestions offered in the Country Note build on these sources and dialogues. However, they can only be tentative. The USA, with its federal system of 50 different states, each with varying policies and approaches towards early childhood education and care, is a particularly challenging country to review. Despite the varied expertise of the review team, including prior experience in cross-national studies, we are fully aware of the potential limitations of the case study review procedure, and of the fact that the stance we adopt is necessarily influenced by our own cultural lens.

Terminology—definitions

13. Compulsory school age is determined by state and ranges from five to eight years; most children begin compulsory school at age six. Early childhood education and care in the U.S. covers a vast range of services and programmes for children from birth to eight, though the focus of this report is from birth to six. These different forms of provision are funded and administered by a similarly diverse range of private (for-profit and not-for-profit) providers and public agencies and include:

14. *Kindergarten:* Part- or full-day educational provision under the responsibility of state education authorities for children the year before beginning compulsory schooling (i.e., five year olds) in public and some private primary schools.

15. *Pre-schools*: Educational provision under the responsibility of state education authorities or with direct funding grants from the federal level which are open either half-day or during school hours (9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.) and may include:

- *pre-kindergartens* (for three, four, and five year olds who are not age eligible for kindergarten);
- *compensatory education programmes* (for children under six) in centres or schools;
- *nursery schools* (usually for two to five year olds) in public and private part-day centres.

16. *Child care centres (or day care centres)*: Services, primarily for children of working parents, under the auspices of health and/or social welfare agencies or run on a private (commercial and non-profit) basis. These centres are generally open all the year round on an extended day basis (7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.). Child care centres may include groups for infants (under one year) and toddlers (one to two years of age); and/or groups for pre-school age children (three to five year olds). Some may also offer services for school-age children. These full-day centres may be variously named *child development centres, early learning centres*, or carry the name of a specific initiative or sponsor.

17. *Family child care (or family day care)*: Provision in the caregiver's own home on a purchase-of-service basis ('kith and kin' arrangements, nannies, and babysitters are not included in this report).

18. It is important to note that these definitions are intended to guide the reader. In practice, the use and meaning of these terms may vary greatly from setting to setting. For example, a named 'pre-school' may also provide full-day child care services, and conversely, a 'child care centre' may provide care for children of working parents as well as educational provision or just may choose to refer to its setting as a 'pre-school.'

CHAPTER 2: MAJOR ECEC POLICY PRIORITIES IN THE USA : A BRIEF OVERVIEW

19. Three major policy priorities currently dominate early childhood education and care debate and policy-making in the USA. These are (1) expanding the number of available places in child care and educational provision, particularly for children under three years of age; (2) improving the quality of ECEC provision; (3) targeting provision and funding at low-income and 'at-risk' families. This short, scene-setting chapter aims to briefly outline these current priorities. Chapter 3 presents some of the main contextual factors shaping these policies, and Chapters 4 and 5 describe and discuss the themes and issues arising from the visit in more detail.

Expanding provision

20. The current move to expand provision stems from three major sources. The first is the dramatic rise in the number of women in the work force, particularly of married mothers. Whereas in 1960, one-fifth of mothers with a child under age six were employed, this rate had more than tripled by 1996, and the rise in the proportion of working mothers with children under age three has been even more marked. With no mandated *paid* maternal or paternal leave, more than half of all women are now returning to work within one year of having a child. A second factor—and perhaps the most significant recent one to impact on early education and care—centres around new welfare legislation. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 requires that low-income women 'engage' in work within two years of claiming public assistance, although states may exempt women with infants (under age one) from the work requirement. A third source has been the growing interest in 'school readiness'—both as a policy goal, as formulated by the National Education Goals Panel in 1989 *("By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn")*—and as a cost-effectiveness factor. A number of research studies in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrated links between early learning experiences, later school achievement and 'adult productivity'. Seen from this perspective, ECEC is beginning to be viewed as a worthwhile investment in order to ensure that a future workforce will have the necessary foundation skills, competencies, and dispositions to be successful in an increasingly competitive, economy-driven society. Additionally, new knowledge about the development of the brain during the first three years of life has given impetus to a policy concern about the quality of provision offered (Shore, 1997). The result of these varied shifts and changing perceptions is that parents of young children are in need—probably more than at any other time in the history of the USA—of reliable family support structures, and of stimulating and responsive learning environments for their children. However, the available provision does not match these demands and requirements. Millions of children do not have access to early care and education, in particular children from low-income families. Although private, for-profit centres have mushroomed, services are not accessible across the nation, they are not affordable for large sections of the population, and quality standards vary greatly.

Improving the quality of provision

21. A number of longitudinal research studies in the USA have demonstrated how high quality services for young children from low-income families can have a positive effect on their subsequent chances in school and adult life. However, a recent investigation in four different states (CQCO Study Team, 1995) which examined over 400 full-day, community child care programmes for children of *all* income groups, discovered that the vast majority of young children attend services that are at best mediocre, and more often than not of poor quality. 40% of the rooms in infant and toddler centres were even found to endanger children's health and safety. Similar findings have been reported from a study of family child care homes (Galinsky et al., 1994). Because of the cost of or the lack of access to regulated forms of ECEC provision, reliance on informal, non-licensed child care arrangements is likely to increase. One of the key issues at the heart of the quality debate—particularly in centres—is a staffing crisis. Staff are on the whole trained at a minimal professional level, many are untrained, pay is low (much lower than for nurses, for example), turnover is high, and recruitment and retention are central issues. There is no across-state co-ordinated qualifications system for early childhood workers, and individual state guidelines vary considerably in the minimum standards they consider acceptable for working in the field. A further issue is the licensing of centres and family child care homes. Again, state requirements vary considerably as to the quality standards expected (and in some cases they are limited to basic hygiene and safety requirements). Many policy measures at the state level (see Chapter 4) are attempting to address these concerns in order to improve the quality of early childhood experiences for vast numbers of America's children.

Targeting programmes and provision at low-income and 'at-risk' children and families

22. Public investment in early education and care in the U.S. is conceptualised around the delivery of specified 'programmes'. In effect, this means that different federal and state agencies have policy responsibility for different age-groups and for different population groups. For children in the year immediately preceding compulsory school entry, kindergarten administered by the education authorities as part of the formal school system is nearly universal, and in 11 states and the District of Columbia kindergarten attendance is even a state requirement. However, publicly-funded pre-school programmes for children below kindergarten age are not considered to be a universal entitlement for all children of the population. Instead, they typically serve children from low-income families and children considered to be 'at risk' as a result of biological, socio-economic or psychological circumstances, or combinations of these. The Head Start programme is perhaps the best known of the federal policy initiatives targeting very poor and vulnerable children. Set up in 1965 as part of the Johnson administration's War on Poverty, Head Start was recently (1998) reauthorised to carry on its comprehensive services of education, physical and mental health, social services, nutrition, and parent involvement. Other nation-wide initiatives (but with a considerably lower budget than Head Start) include Early Head Start for infants and toddlers, the Even Start family literacy programme, Title I programmes for children from economically disadvantaged families, and IDEA special education programmes. Family support programmes also tend to serve low-income families.[3] While targeting limited resources to those in most need is understandable, it seems that the vast majority of children from middle-income families, who cannot afford high quality programmes and are not eligible for publicly-funded options, may lose out in the process. In addition, as selecting and using high quality programmes is a question of affordability, only wealthy families seem to have full access to programmes of their choice.

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3. These programmes are described in greater detail in Chapter 4.

23. In addition, each of these programmes has different expectations about ECEC outcomes. These may include (Kamerman & Gatenio, in preparation): increasing workforce productivity; preventing welfare dependence, juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, and school failure; supporting parents living in poverty; enhancing young children's development; or nurturing parenting skills. The range of programmes is impressive. On the whole, however, there is no overall approach towards integrating these various policy concerns to create a coherent and effective system of education and care for young children and their families.

CHAPTER 3: CONTEXTUAL ISSUES SHAPING ECEC POLICIES IN THE USA

Demography

24. The USA is a very large country (9 372 000 sq. km.) with a population density of 28 persons per sq. km. This is much lower than that of the European Union (which averages at 115) and also lower than that of most other OECD member states. The U.S. comprises 50 states—48 mainland states, the vast state of Alaska, situated north-west of Canada, and the islands of Hawaii, located 2000 miles to the south-west in the Pacific Ocean.

25. The overall population of the United States has expanded at an annual population growth rate of 1% over the last two decades, from approximately 220 million in 1975 to 273 870 763 in October 1999.[4] This is a considerably higher rate than for most European countries and a considerably lower rate than in non-western societies. Like most other western societies, the U.S. has a steadily ageing population. In 1997, 12.0% were 65 years old and above (compared with 9.2% in 1960). For children under the age of 15, the trend is opposite. Whereas in 1960 they accounted for 31.0% of the total population, in 1997 this rate was down to 22.3%. The proportion of children under five is also gradually decreasing (from 7.6% in 1990 to 6.9% in 1999). Table 1 illustrates both the national population level and the levels in the three states visited.

Table 1. Overall population / Children under 5 as % of population

	Overall population	*Children under 5 as % of population*
USA nation-wide	273 870 763 (1999) 265 190 000 (1996)	6.9 7.3
Colorado	3 822 676 (1996)	8.5
North Carolina	7 322 870 (1996)	8.5
Ohio	11 172 782 (1996)	8.2

26. The United States has a relatively high fertility rate compared with most European countries, 2.0 in 1997, and one which has risen since 1975 (1.8). A concern about poor families (e.g. single mothers) having additional children to remain on public assistance was one of the driving forces behind the introduction of new welfare legislation which is having a significant impact on the demand for child care (see below).

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4. Unless otherwise stated, the figures in this section come from four sources: *OECD Statistics on Member States* (1999), the U.S. Census Bureau (1999), the *U.N. Human Development Report* (1999), and the National Child Care Information Center (1999).

27. As Table 2 shows, the child population is growing in linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity. In 1998, 65% of children under 15 were white, non-Hispanic; 15% were African-American; 15% were Hispanic; 4% were Asian/Pacific Islander; and 1% were American Indian/Alaska Native (Forum on Child and Family Statistics web site, 1999).

Table 2. Ethnic origin of children in the USA

Current (1997) and projected (2005)

	1997	Projections for 2005	% change
White, non-Hispanic	45 646 600	44 208 100	- 3
Black	10 185 900	11 013 000	+ 8
Hispanic	10 328 300	12 466 800	+ 21
Asian and Pacific Islander	2 692 400	3 563 000	+ 32
Native American	674 800	713 000	+ 6
Total	**69 527 900**	71 963 000	+ 4

Source: 1999 Kids Count Data Online

Labour market—women in the workforce—unemployment

28. Movements on the labour market have been dominated by a dramatic increase in the number of mothers with young children working outside the home, as illustrated in Table 3 (cf. Kamerman & Gatenio, in preparation).

Table 3. Labour force participation of women
by presence and age of children under 6

Year	Total	Under 2	Under 3
1960	20.2	Not available	NA
1970	32.2	NA	NA
1975	38.8	31.5	34.1
1985	53.5	48.0	49.5
1995	62.3	57.9	58.7
1996	62.3	57.9	59.0

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

29. While in 1960, only one-fifth of mothers with a child under age six were employed, this proportion had increased to two-thirds by 1996. The labour force participation of mothers with a child under the age of three has followed a similar trend. While in 1975, about one-third worked outside the home, in 1996 nearly 60% were in the labour force. For mothers of infants under age one, the proportional increase has been even more significant. Two-thirds of working mothers with children under age six work full-time (i.e. at least 35 hours per week), and one third part-time. Not only has there been a dramatic rise in the number of married mothers entering the labour market, there has also been a significant increase in the number of single-mother households, all contributory factors towards demand for early childhood education and care services, in particular for full-day programmes. While the number of two-parent families with children rose by 20% from 1970 to 1996, the number of female-headed families with children increased by 127%, to 12.5 million. Divorced mothers have the highest labour force participation rates across all age categories. These developments must be seen in a context of no universal child allowances, no publicly-funded child support for children of divorced parents, no guaranteed minimum income, and high rates of teen pregnancy. There are links between these demographic changes and poverty levels.

30. Compared with many European countries, the U.S. has a low level of unemployment. In 1997, the unemployment rate averaged at 5.0% compared with averages of 11.2% in the European Union and 7.2% in OECD countries.

31. In terms of gender equality, women's participation in the workforce at management level is high. 44.3% of administrators and managers in the U.S. are women—a considerably higher percentage than in many European countries, such as Norway (30.6%), Germany (26.6%), or Belgium (18.8%). However, participation in political decision making is much lower. Only 12.5% of the seats in the U.S. Congress are held by women. This is considerably less than parliamentary representation in Sweden (42.7%), Norway (36.4%) and Germany (29.8%), but more than in Italy (10.0%) or France (9.1%).

Welfare legislation and family leave policy

32. Recent welfare reform legislation has had a major impact on public assistance legislation for poor single mothers and children—and on the demand for child care. The welfare reform law establishes a five-year lifetime limit on receiving welfare. Most welfare recipients are single mothers who cannot work without child care. The requirements of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 mean that the majority of poor mothers heading a household with young children are now expected to work. As formal child care services are often not available in low-income neighbourhoods, many welfare recipients, either by choice or necessity, rely on informal or unregulated care arrangements for their children.

33. As a result of the new welfare reform bill, four separate child care funding streams have been consolidated into a single Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). Federal money available to states for child care has expanded, both by increasing funding for the CCDF block grant and by allowing states to shift funds from the PRWORA's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant to the CCDF programme (TANF funds also can be spent directly on child care services). In 1999, the final budget bill failed to increase child care funding at all, despite the fact that only one in ten children whose families could use child care assistance receive any financial help.

34. The U.S. has only three months of federally mandated parental leave at childbirth, and this is unpaid (Kamerman & Gatenio, in preparation). The Family and Medical Leave Act, enacted in 1993, is very limited in its support for young families generally. The 12 week job-protected leave is not only unpaid, but is currently not applicable in companies with less than 50 employees. Employers in companies with more than 50 employees can require that workers use their vacation and sick leave before claiming the family leave. At the state level, five states (California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island) provide paid disability leave which, since 1977, is required to cover pregnancy and maternity, and thus offers a kind of paid maternity leave at the time of childbirth. President Clinton recently proposed a new plan to help states be more flexible in offering paid leave to working parents. The strategy allows states to use their existing unemployment insurance programmes to offer paid leave from work to new parents, a mechanism used in several other countries including Austria and Canada. He also proposed $20 million in competitive grants to help states develop and evaluate new approaches for providing paid family leave to workers.

Related policy areas

35. Many different policy areas influence developments in the field of early childhood education and care. These include—as noted above—labour market policy and public assistance policy. Similarly, education policy, health policy, housing policy, or tax policy have a significant impact on the field. In the USA, education policies, for example, generally target specific groups of older pre-school children. Current health care policy, which considers health insurance to be a private matter, means that many early childhood services are concerned with securing health benefits for the children who attend. A further implication is that early screening for disabilities and developmental delays has become an important element of ECEC programmes (e.g. Head Start). Housing policy in its current form has led to *de facto* segregation of families according to income, and often race. In this respect, it not only influences the particular child population in local early childhood centres, but housing location may also significantly affect families' access to services.

Standard of living and child poverty

36. The United States is among the industrialised countries with the highest per capita income. In 1997, per capita income was $21 541[5], an increase of over $6 000 since 1975, a level surpassed only by Luxembourg, Norway, Switzerland, Japan, Denmark and Iceland. In 1998, household incomes rose for the fourth consecutive year, surpassing a 1989 pre-recession high. However, figures for the distribution of wealth, rather than income, show high levels of inequality, with extremes of wealth and poverty.

37. Young children in the U.S. are more likely to live in poverty than any other age group in the population. Over the last 25 years, the poverty rate of children under the age of 6 has steadily increased, from 16.6% in 1970 to 22.0% in 1997. 5.2 million children under the age of six in the U.S. live in families with incomes below the federal poverty line ($12 802 for a family of three in 1997), and 10% of all children under age six live in families with incomes of under 50% of the poverty line. A report published by the National Center for Children in Poverty (1999) states:

38. The changing face of young child poverty defies stereotypes and affects all segments of American life. For instance, the rate of growth of the young child poverty rate from 1975-79 to 1993-97 was much greater in the suburbs (50%) than in the cities (31%). The rate of growth was also much higher among whites (25%) than African Americans (18%).

39. In 1997, 40% of African American, 38% of Latino, and 13% of white, non-Hispanic children under six lived in poverty. Table 4 shows the poverty rates in the U.S. and in the three states visited by the review team.

Table 4. Children under 6 poverty rate (percent)

USA nation-wide	**22.0** (1997)
Colorado	17.2 (1992-1996 average)
North Carolina	24.6 (1992-1996 average)
Ohio	23.1 (1992-1996 average)

Governance

40. The USA is a federal system of 50 states, and powers not delegated to the federal government by the Constitution are retained by the states. Each state has its own constitution and government, the governor being the state's chief executive. States are divided into local government units responsible for local services: counties, boroughs, parishes, cities, towns and school districts.

41. U.S. politics is essentially dominated by two main parties: the Republicans and the Democrats. Smaller parties (e.g. the Libertarian Party) are insignificant in terms of their elected representation. Each of the two main parties represents a broad range of views, and members of Congress do not always vote strictly on party lines. Support for child care and early education is to be found across parties, although policy priorities generally differ, with the Republicans tending more towards direct support for individual families (e.g. through child care subsidies and tax credits) and the Democrats towards increased involvement by government in the establishment and maintenance of specific programmes.

5. In June 2000, 1 US Dollar ($1) = 1.057 Euro.

42. ECEC policies include the whole range of government mechanisms at the federal and the state level, and increasingly at the local government level, which aim to influence the supply and/or demand, and the quality of early education and care facilities. Recently, there has been an increased devolution of responsibilities from the federal level to the state level, a trend which raises numerous issues concerning decision-making, funding distribution and quality assurance. These and other features of ECEC policy and provision are explored in further detail in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: CURRENT ECEC POLICY AND PROVISION IN THE USA

The ECEC system in the USA

43. An important starting point for trying to understand the U.S. system of early childhood education and care is to realise that there is no 'system'. There is no national co-ordinated policy framework, and none of the 50 states across the country has as yet established a coherent within-state approach concerning early services for children under compulsory school age. Instead, three separate sub-systems operate alongside one another, and very often—as far as funding is concerned—in competition with one another. These are (1) Head Start, targeting very poor young children, (2) the market-oriented, purchase-of-service system, serving children from birth to compulsory school age in centres and private homes, and (3) the public school system, offering kindergarten classes, education for designated target groups of pre-school age children, and sometimes wrap-around out-of-school services for school-age children. Each of these sub-systems has its own infrastructure, its own history and traditions, its own goals and practices, and its own standards. Of these three systems, both the Head Start programmes and the public school institutions have a number of recognisable and consistent features across provision, whereas the purchase-of-service system is unlimited in its diversity.

Types of provision and coverage

Head Start

44. Head Start is a federal government initiative with a 35 year old history. Administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, it was created as an anti-poverty programme with a strong local and community base. Over the years, Head Start has received continued funding through both conservative and more liberal administrations. Budget allocations have increased steadily, reaching almost $4.7 billion in fiscal year 1999 and $5.27 billion in fiscal year 2000. Today Head Start, as distinct from most other child care and pre-kindergarten provision, funds community-based agencies which aim to provide comprehensive education, health and support services for poor families with young children. These include health and developmental screenings and social service assistance. Parent participation is one of the key aims of the programme. To be eligible for Head Start, a child must be living in a family with income below the federal poverty line (currently $17 050 for a family of four). 10% of the children enrolled in each programme may be filled by children whose families exceed the low-income guidelines, and 10% of the available places are intended for children with disabilities. In 1997-1998, 13% of Head Start attendees were children with disabilities. Head Start programmes are predominantly centre-based but may also be home-based, reaching (in 1999) a total of 826 000 children aged mostly four years. Although Head Start reaches an impressive number of children, expansion has not kept pace with growing need; 36% of eligible children receive services. Local grantees are required to meet national Head Start Performance Standards, and the programme is subject to a 20% funding match at the local level.

45. In 1994, the Early Head Start programme was set up in order to reach low-income pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers, and significant budget increases have been made since then (rising from $47.2 million in 1995 to $279 million in 1998). As with Head Start, Early Head Start focuses on child development, family development, community building and staff development.

46. Head Start is implementing a major initiative to expand full-day/full-year services through partnerships with other early childhood programmes and funding sources. Over the past four years, nearly $800 million in funding to expand Head Start and Early Head Start enrolment has been targeted to this collaborative strategy, and a number of states have allocated funding for additional full-day/full-year Head Start services.

Purchase-of-service system

47. The purchase-of-service delivery system is dominated by private providers. In 1990, while approximately 10% of providers were in the public system, 90% were in the private sector. Of these, roughly two-thirds were not-for-profit agencies and one-third for-profit enterprises. For-profit organisations can range from large franchising operations (child care chains) to an individual woman caring for two or three children in her own home. Provision in the purchase-of-service system can take on many forms.[6] These may be:

- full-day centres for infants and toddlers and/or three to five year old children, with some also offering services for school-age children;
- part-day nursery schools and pre-schools;
- family child care homes and group home providers, which may be large (12 children, with two caregivers) or small (between two and four children);
- school-age programmes (e.g. before and after school and during school vacations).

Public school system

48. The only kind of nearly universal provision is the state-funded kindergarten under the auspices of the education authorities, which covers the year before entry into primary school. Kindergartens are available to nearly all children who meet the age requirements (which differs by state) at public expense. Although most kindergarten classes are part of public primary schools, parents also have the option of enrolling their children in privately-sponsored kindergartens (Kamerman & Gatenio, in preparation).

49. The number of state-funded *pre*-kindergarten programmes is growing significantly (Schulman, Blank, & Ewen, 1999). However, the definition of 'pre-kindergarten' is very broad: state policies differ concerning their goals, administrative structures and funding, the types of agencies operating programmes, the eligibility criteria, the quality standards, and the scope of supports provided to children and families. At the same time, state-funded pre-kindergarten programmes do share common characteristics in that they

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6. In addition, the purchase-of-service system includes in-home care, provided by nannies, au-pairs, housekeepers, or baby-sitters. Non-market care includes care by a parent at home or at work, care by a sibling, by grandparents, or by other relatives (kin), or by a close friend of the family (kith). These market and non-market care arrangements are not covered in this report.

focus on early childhood education during the one or two years preceding kindergarten, that children attend for two or more days a week, and that they are distinct from the state's child care subsidy system. Like Head Start, most of these programmes are targeted at children considered to be at-risk of later school failure. Unlike Head Start, most are not designed as comprehensive child and family programmes. The team visited the county-wide Bright Beginnings Pre-Kindergarten Programme in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, North Carolina (see below).

Box 1. Bright Beginnings Pre-kindergarten Programme

In 1997, the Superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina initiated the BRIGHT BEGINNINGS pre-kindergarten programme, with the goal of raising the percentage of third graders' reading at or above grade level to 85% by the year 2001. The Bright Beginnings curriculum is: "designed to provide a rich, child-centred, literacy-focused program to ensure that all children in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County enter kindergarten ready to learn. The program attempts to provide those key experiences, especially in the areas of language and early literacy development, that lay the foundation for early school success." Learning units are organised around one book every two weeks. Every day, there are four literacy circle times of 15-20 minutes, which are designed to be child-centred, with lots of songs, etc. Two 90-minute sessions give children the opportunity to explore science, mathematics, writing, art, and computers in different 'centres'. The daily schedule also includes outdoor music and movement and read-aloud time. At the end of the day, children 'review' the day's events. The programme is designed to be a partnership between teachers and parents, and parent involvement is encouraged. Teachers send books home with children every day and often they provide literacy activities for children to do with their parents.

All teachers in the programme are certified to work with children from birth to kindergarten age, and they receive the same benefits and salaries as public school teachers. There is one teacher and one assistant for each group of 18 children. Other staff include a nurse, social worker, child development specialist. The programme operates in school-based centres, and community partnerships (e.g., Head Start and faith-based settings). There are three pre-kindergarten centres, one mini-centre and nine school-based Bright Beginnings sites. Children are selected according to a screening for 'educational need.' The programme serves 2 000 four year olds out of the target population of 4 000. The programme operates five days a week, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., 10 months a year. The county has allocated 85% of its federal Title I funding to the programme, which covers 85% of the total cost; the remaining 15% is covered by local funding. A preliminary evaluation found that children in the Bright Beginnings programme scored better than eligible non-participants on all measures of the Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP) (i.e., literacy and mathematics competencies and social-behavioural items). In addition, Bright Beginnings students outpaced *all* kindergarten children in four major components of the KEP: book and print awareness; decoding and word recognition; language comprehension; and social interaction.

Family support programmes

50. Family support programmes are sometimes also included with other ECEC programmes, because they provide a range of services for young children and their families. However, they do not provide regular child care services, apart from "drop-in" facilities, and thus do not permit mothers to enter employment. Family support programmes tend to serve families living in or at-risk of poverty (e.g. teen parents, those dependent on welfare, immigrant families), and have a broad focus on the family (versus individual children). They offer a more flexible set of services than most public, school-based programmes. Although they primarily target families with children under age three, they may also include families with older children. Family support services rely both on public funds and on private foundation support, and are offered free of charge. A caseworker links services that are provided by other community agencies. Family support programmes may offer drop-in child care, information and referral services, home visits, or parenting classes aimed at strengthening parenting skills. Some try to link up with parental support programmes, such as job training and education.

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Coverage

51. In 1995, roughly 60% of all children under age six not yet attending a public or private kindergarten were in some kind of non-parental care arrangement (in-home care, care by relatives, family child care homes, centres) on a regular basis, accounting for 12.9 million infants, toddlers and pre-school age children (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). However, the fact that often multiple arrangements are used for children to make up a full day away from parents (e.g. Head Start in the morning plus some form of family or kith care in the afternoon) is not captured by the available statistics.

52. According to an extensive study carried out by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (1996, reported in Kamerman & Gatenio, in preparation), more than half of children under the age of one are cared for by a relative, 22% in family child care, 9% in centre-based settings. When children reach the age of three, parental preferences for type of care change. Whereas only 19% of two year olds attend a centre, 41% of three year olds are in centre-based settings. The percentage of children ages three to four who are enrolled in pre-primary programmes increased significantly between 1996 and 1997—from 45% to 48% (Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1999). Table 5 on the enrolment of three to five year olds in centres (here defined either as 'nursery school' or 'kindergarten') differentiates according to age and length of programme day. It illustrates that the number of children attending part-time programmes (4 019 000) is considerably higher than the number in full-time (generally covering only the school day) attendance (3 562 000).

Table 5. 1996 Enrolment of 3 to 5 year olds in centre-based, pre-primary programmes by type
(in thousands)

Total population, 3 to 5 year olds		Total enrolment	Nursery school		Kindergarten		Enrolment in programme by length of day	
Age			Public	Private	Public	Private	Full-day	Part-day
3	4 045	1 506	511	947	22	26	657	848
4	4 148	2 454	1 029	1 168	180	77	1 034	1 420
5	4 185	3 621	290	202	2 652	477	1 870	1 750
Total (% of 3-5 year olds)	**12 378**	**7 580 (61%)**	**1 830 (15%)**	**2 317 (19%)**	**2 853 (23%)**	**580 (0.05%)**	**3 562 (29%)**	**4 019 (30%)**

Source: Digest of Education Statistics 1997, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (in USA Background Report)

Funding and finance

Private expenditure

53. While there has been a very substantial increase in government expenditures over the last decade, it is parents and households that shoulder the main burden of financing the current ECEC system in the U.S. Based on estimates for 1999 (Barnett & Masse, in preparation), the contribution of household expenditures amounted to 59%, whereas federal dollars accounted for 27% and state dollars for 14% of total expenditure. In real figures, this means that parents are currently paying up to $30 billion dollars for ECEC services, or that child care costs each household an average of $4 000 a year.

54. In 1993, the majority of working families with children from birth to five years paid $74 per week for child care services. Poor families spent 18% of their income on child care, while other families spent only 7% of their income (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995). Families pay higher fees for child care than they pay for higher education tuition and also a larger share of the total cost (nearly 60% compared to 23%), because state governments, foundations, endowments, and businesses invest more in higher education than in child care and early education. A Children's Defense Fund 1998 report, *Child Care Challenges* surveyed child care costs for four year olds in urban child care centres nationally. The survey found that in every state the average child care tuition exceeds $3 000 a child, and in 17 states, fees rose to more than $5 000 per child. In 15 states, tuition for a single year of public university is less than half than what parent's pay for child care (Adams & Schulman, 1998).

55. Early childhood education and care is embedded in the specific social, political and historical context of the country in question. In the U.S., private corporations and philanthropic organisations, generally founded as a 'spin-off' of business enterprise, have traditionally played an important role—as energising forces, as politically non-aligned voices, and as funding sources for innovations and research. In recent years—in response to the crisis in terms of provision level and quality—these organisations have often been important players in new efforts to raise funds and to co-ordinate resources within collaborative, community-oriented initiatives. Examples of such initiatives are described at the end of this chapter. One such philanthropic organisation is the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton, in Ohio. In 1998, the Foundation launched its first proactive grant-making initiative, the *Quality Child Care Initiative*. The initiative provides funds for centres and pre-schools pursuing the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation; addresses specific support services for centres and family child care providers; runs a resource centre offering continuing education opportunities for child care providers; campaigns for ECEC, and supports advocacy efforts that may lead to improved policy. Over the past two years, the Sisters of Charity Foundation has invested $2 million in ECEC through its *Quality Child Care Initiative* to date, with an anticipated $3 million more over the next three years.

56. The two major *public* funding sources are at the federal and the state level. Local government funding policies (at a county or district level) depend greatly on the responsibilities granted to localities at state level.

Federal funding

57. Federal funding—as mentioned above—is targeted at low-income groups and children with disabilities. Policy-making responsibilities include the provision of comprehensive compensatory education for disadvantaged three to five year olds (and more recently for birth to three year olds), providing child care subsidies for low-income and welfare dependent families, and extending children's health coverage and nutrition. Two federal departments in particular are responsible for administering the funding: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE).

58. Some of the major grant systems administered by the U.S. DHHS are:

- Head Start and Early Head Start (to support early childhood education and development services for low-income children aged three to five years and birth to three years)

- The Child Care and Development Fund (to subsidise child care expenses for families with working parents earning less than 85% of the state median)

- The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), Title XX of the Social Security Act (to provide grants to states for social services, which most states draw on for at least a portion of their ECEC services—almost 14% in 1998).

59. The U.S. DOE administers:

- Title I programmes (funding to schools based on the percentage of economically disadvantaged children)

- Even Start (a family literacy programme)

- IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) grant programmes for pre-primary services (targeted at three to five year olds) and grants for infants and toddlers (which may be used to implement state-wide early intervention services for children under age three with disabilities and their families).

60. Other major sources of federal funds are:

- The Dependent Care Tax Credit (a non-refundable credit for expenses for the care of a dependent child less than 13 years old, administered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Working parents can claim care expenses up to a maximum of $2 400 for one child and $4 800 for more than one child; the maximum credit working parents can obtain is $720 for one child and $1 440 for two or more children. In reality, few families receive this maximum credit since the lowest income families either do not pay taxes and/or do not have enough qualifying expenses for the maximum credit)

- The Child and Adult Food Program (administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, this programme subsidises meals meeting federal nutrition requirements in licensed child care centres, schools, and family child care homes serving low-income children under 13)

- The Dependent Care Assistance Plan (this programme, administered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury allows taxpayers to exclude up to $5 000 a year from taxable income, to pay for child care expenses for children from 0 to 14).

Federal expenditures on early education and care
(in millions of 1999 constant dollars)

Programme	1992	1999
Head Start/Early Head Start	2 522	4 660
Child Care and Development Fund (formerly 4 funding streams: Child Care and Development Block Grant, At-Risk Child Care Program, Transitional Child Care, Aid to Families with Dependent Children)	1 596 (millions in 1992 dollars)	3 167
Social Services Block Grant	513	191
Title I (Chapter I) (figures based on an average of 8% of total Title I resources)	614	666
Even Start	80	138
IDEA—Part B (special education, 3-5 year olds)	202	206
IDEA—Part C (special education, 0-3 year olds)	200	370
Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit	2041	1 637
Child and Adult Care Food Program	908	1 052
Dependent Care Assistance Plan	-	923

Source: Barnett & Masse, in preparation (adapted)

61. The table illustrates how overall funding has increased considerably over the past seven years, with particularly significant rises in the resources allocated to Head Start/Early Head Start and through the Child Care and Development Fund. Expenditures for both have practically doubled during this time. The table also illustrates a change of emphasis in funding priorities. Funding for public ECEC services has increased, whereas tax credit allocations for child care purposes have decreased. Today, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is the primary source of assistance for low-income families who cannot afford child care. In fiscal year 2000, the CCDF made available $3.5 billion to states, territories, and tribes. In addition, states are allowed to transfer up to 30% of their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant funds to the CCDF programme. Recent data indicate that between fiscal 1997 and the first half of fiscal 1999, 26 states have transferred a total of $736 million in TANF funds to their CCDF to promote the availability, affordability, and quality of child care for working parents (National Governors' Association, 2000).

62. The CCDF, authorised by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, assists low-income families, families receiving temporary public assistance, and those transitioning from public assistance in order to work or attend training/further education. To be eligible for a child care subsidy (1) the parents must be working or in education or training (or the children must be receiving protective services); (2) the family's income level cannot exceed 85% of the state median income level for a family of the same size (although states may set stricter income requirements), and (3) the child must be under age 13 (although states have the option of serving children over 13 who are under court supervision or are mentally or physically incapable of self care). Fiscal year 2000 funding includes additional funding for specific purposes: quality expansion ($172 million), improving care for infants and toddlers ($50 million), improving school-age care and Child Care Resource and Referral Services ($19 million).

63. Subsidised child care services are available to eligible families through certificates or contracts with providers. Parents may select any legally operating provider which meets the basic health and safety requirements set by states and tribes. Families receiving a subsidy contribute to the cost of care on a sliding fee basis. States may exempt families below the poverty level from paying the co-payment. A minimum of 4% of CCDF funds must be used to improve the quality of child care and offer additional services to parents, such as resource and referral counselling. To improve the health and safety of available child care,

many states now provide incentives such as training, grants and loans to providers, improved monitoring, or compensation projects.

64. CCDF funds for Indian tribes amounted to approximately $71 million (2% of the total CCDF grant funds). This level of funding has more than doubled the direct funding available to tribes prior to the welfare reform. Tribes, unlike states, may use a portion of their CCDF funds to construct or renovate child care facilities, provided there is no reduction in the current level of child care services.

65. In 1998, a five-year Task Force was set up to address the fragmentation of government services available to the 550 tribes of American Indian and Alaska Native children (Presidential Documents, 1998). The six educational goals formulated were for the school-age population and did not include pre-school children and their families. In 1999, as part of an initiative to address this situation, the sum allocated to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs was increased. These federal dollars go to local agencies, as in the case of Head Start. They are distributed to the school districts to help local schools with supplies of materials, and not to the state education departments. The sovereign Indian nations have a nation to nation legal relationship with the federal government, one that does not "neatly fit" into the U.S. federal system.

State and local funding

66. Over the last decade or so, the states have overall greatly increased their intervention role in early childhood education and care. However, the extent of funding varies according to state priorities. These may be Head Start supplements, establishing a state pre-kindergarten system (for four year olds), supplementing federal dollars for child care subsidies, tax credit systems, and so on. Ohio is one of the 12 states that has chosen to complement the federal funding for Head Start. The $171 million federal dollars for the year 1998 were supplemented by $92 million state dollars in the year 1999, serving in total 35 300 children.

67. State support can also take the form of higher subsidies for accredited programmes. While Ohio has used the Head Start model on which to build, North Carolina—through the Smart Start initiative, which will be described in detail later—has included all forms of ECEC provision. A new licensing regulation is now in operation in North Carolina which assesses settings with a star rating between one and five, and subsidies and benefits are allocated accordingly. Some states may choose to use the tax system to fund child care services. Colorado is a good example. A child care tax check off has been introduced on the *state* income tax returns so that tax payers can choose to donate money they would receive as a tax refund to state child care initiatives. At the *local* level, the well-known ski resort Aspen has chosen to devote local sales taxes to social services.

Programme content—curriculum

68. In terms of programme philosophy and content, the range in the U.S. is wide. At least 15 recognisable curriculum models or approaches have been identified in the research literature (Katz, in preparation). As with other dimensions of ECEC programmes, the orientation chosen is at least partly influenced by the particular sub-system within which the provision is located. However, apart from the federally-funded and time-targeted programmes such as Even Start (see below), there are no government requirements concerning programme content and implementation, i.e. there is no national or state curriculum even within the publicly-funded system.

69. Programme content reflects different historical traditions and philosophies concerning the purpose of early childhood education and care. Some are geared to preparing children for the next stage of schooling (school readiness), and this in practice is reflected in activities that stress literacy and numeracy skills. Others emphasise child development and individual learning paths around the notion of 'developmentally appropriate practice'. Some of the key terms used to describe these contrasting curriculum emphases are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6. ECEC programme orientations: Some contrasting emphases

Constructivist	Instructivist
Child initiated	Teacher initiated / directed
Child-centred	Teacher-centred
Play-based, progressive	Didactic / traditional
Personal-social development	Basic academic skills
Developmentally appropriate	Developmentally
Process oriented	inappropriate
Informal / emergent	Product oriented
Children 'constructing' their own	Formal / structured
knowledge	Core knowledge

Source: Katz, in preparation

70. Of the federally funded programmes, Head Start programme goals and curriculum are framed by 'program performance standards' and 'performance measures' which endorse a comprehensive approach to fostering child development and school readiness, including physical health, cognitive development, social and emotional development, language development, emerging literacy and numeracy development, and creative arts. Recent legislation mandates more explicit attention to tracking and fostering children's progress in specific indicators of language and literacy development (e.g. "recognizing 10 letters of the alphabet"). The Even Start early childhood family literacy programme is designed to build children's language and literacy and includes a programme to train teachers at the community level. As a programme, Even Start stresses the development of cognitive skills. Once the federal dollars get to the local school level, there is considerable flexibility of use, and many public schools choose to integrate elements of the Even Start programme into the mainstream curriculum, rather than taking children out of class for specific tutoring. IDEA (Individual with Disabilities Education Act) is another federally funded programme which targets children from age three onwards. According to this law, which was revised in 1997, all states provide services to pre-school children with identified special needs according to the individualised education plan (IEP), which sets out a programme that will meet the student's educational needs, ensure appropriate placement, and provide related services. The IEP is developed in consultation with parents and special education professionals.

Regulatory procedures

71. Regulatory policy offers a "middle alternative between big business and big government" (Morgan, in preparation (a)). Rather than operating services directly, or leaving them to be operated entirely in the private market, regulation provides a framework for governments to monitor privately-run programmes. For more than one hundred years, ECEC services in the U.S. have been predominantly provided by the private sector and licensed by government. In present-day policy terms this means that there are 50 separate sets of regulations, both for the setting of standards and for ensuring that programmes meet these standards. There is no federal licensing, although federal programmes may be regulated by funding requirements.

72. States define the services they will license, and in general these are market programmes, These may be full-day centres, part-day nursery schools and pre-schools, large and small family child care homes, or school-age programmes. (In-home care arrangements provided by workers hired by parents [nanny, au pair] are not subject to licensing regulations). Government-run programmes (e.g. kindergartens) do not need to be licensed, since the public agency administering them is responsible for their quality. 12 states exempt specific providers such as church-based centres, and a few states exempt Montessori schools. Some states exempt a broader range of providers. These may include relatives of the children as well as family child care homes that care for a small number of children. For the two other major delivery systems—Head Start and purchase-of-service—regulatory policy differs. Head Start facilities must meet applicable state and local licensing standards, as well as Head Start Performance Standards, to ensure children's health and safety. However, some states choose to exempt Head Start programmes from their licensing system, given the comprehensive nature of the federal Performance Standards, which include requirements for health and child development services, family and community partnership services, and programme governance and management. Compliance is monitored by annual reports and by site visits conducted every three years. Programmes that fail to meet Performance Standards may lose funding; more than 150 of Head Start's 1 520 grantees have been replaced via this mechanism over the past five years. Child care centres and family child care are licensed by the state-designated licensing agency, generally the state health and human services department.

Table 7. Levels of standards and measures of enforcement

Type of standard	*To whom applied*	*Legal powers used*	*Quality level*
Licensing requirements	All market programmes defined in law	Police powers	Minimum requirements ('at least')
Funding standards	All programmes receiving specific public funds	Contractual agreement	Specifications for purchase
Accreditation standards	All who apply to be accredited	Voluntary agreement	Professionally set quality standards
Goal standards set by professional organisations and councils	All who aspire to 'best practice' on a voluntary basis	Used only as a framework reference	Expert advice

Source: Morgan, in preparation (a), adapted

73. As shown in Table 7 above, licensing is a form of setting minimum standards to which all programmes must adhere. Additionally, some states have chosen to support voluntary accreditation according to the much higher quality standards set by professional associations. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has been very influential in the field of centre accreditation, as has the National Child Care Association (NCCA) with regard to the for-profit programmes. The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) has similarly set standards for family child care, and the National School-Age Care Alliance for school-age programmes.

74. Another influential organisation is the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRA). Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) are to be found in most urban communities and in many rural areas. In a market system these are important agencies for making the market visible for consumers. They also play an important networking role at the local level. They maintain a data bank on child care services in the region. In doing so, the review team was told that they tend to focus mainly on structural dimensions of the various programmes (opening hours, adult/child ratios, etc.) and prefer not to make any kind of value judgement about provision for fear of being sued by for-profit provision if their market position is weakened by negative information about service quality. Other core services of the CCR&Rs include consumer (parent) education about the child care facilities

available in their area, provider training, advocacy, work with employers, and trying to build the supply of care. There are some 600 CCR&Rs across the USA.

75. Regulatory trends centre around the following: more states are regulating group size, although in 1997 there were still 22 states which did not; adult/child ratios have improved for all age groups except two year olds; pre-service staffing requirements have not greatly improved, but the number of in-service or continuing training hours required has. Tables 8 and 9 show the staff/child ratios required for centre-based care and family child care in the states visited. The accreditation body of NAEYC recommends that all groups have at least two 'teachers'. Infants should be in groups of no more than six to eight children (i.e., staff/child ratios of 1:4 maximum); two to three year olds should be in groups of 10 to 14 children (i.e., 1:7 maximum); and four to five year olds should be in groups of 16 to 20 children (i.e., 1:10 maximum).

Table 8. Staff/child ratios in centre-based care in 3 states and in Head Start facilities

Colorado		North Carolina		Ohio		Head Start Performance Standards	
Age range	Ratio	Age range	Ratio	Age range	Ratio	Age range	Ratio
Infants	1:5	Up to 1 year old	1:5	Infants	1:5 and 2:12	Infants	1:4
Toddlers	1:5	1-2 years	1:6	Toddlers 12-18 mo. Toddlers 18-30 mo. Toddlers 30-36 mo.	1:6 1:7 1:8	Toddlers	1:4
2 years	1:7					2 years	1:4
2½ - 3 years	1:8	2-3 years	1:10			2½ - 3 years	1:4
3 years	1:10	3- 4 years	1:15	Pre-school	1:12 and 1:14	3 years	1:8
4 years	1:12	4- 5 years	1:20			4 years	1:10
5 years	1:15	5 years	1:25			5 years	1:10
				School-age	1:18 and 1:20		
				Mixed age group	Ratio for youngest child in group		

Source: National Resource Centre for Health and Safety in Childcare, website, 1999

Table 9. Staff/child ratios in family child care homes in 3 states

Colorado	North Carolina	Ohio
All ages: 1:6 (includes family members plus an additional 2 before and after school children). No more than two children under 2 years of age or if provider has been licensed for at least 2 years with no substantiated complaints, provider may be approved for three children under 2 years of age with no additional school-aged children. Infant / Toddler: 1:4 or 2:6 Large Family Care Home: 2:12 (includes two children under 2 years of age who are siblings of older children)	Infants and pre-school: 1:6 (includes family members plus an additional 2 before and after school children). No more than two children under 2 years of age or if provider has been licensed for at least 2 years with no substantiated complaints, provider may be approved for three children under 2 years of age with no additional school-aged children provider's own pre-school children)	All ages: 1:6 (includes providers children under 6 years of age; no more than 3 children may be under 2 years of age)

Source: National Resource Centre for Health and Safety in Childcare, website, 1999

Staffing of ECEC services

76. The fact that there is no co-ordinated or unified system of early childhood education and care in the U.S. is mirrored, even magnified in the staffing of services. There is no agreed framework system for staff qualifications, neither at the state level nor at the federal level, and there are no agreed procedures for staff licensing. Instead, the different sub-systems mentioned above (Head Start, purchase-of-service child care, public education) each have different staffing requirements. The U.S. Bureau of Labor identifies two roles: a 'child care worker' is classified as someone who dresses, bathes and feeds children and supervises play—a description that would fit the role of an aide or assistant. A 'pre-school teacher' instructs children in a pre-school programme or child care centre. In practice, the term 'teacher' can be any of a number of alternatives, as discussed below.

Staffing in Head Start services

77. Head Start employs a range of workers, including teachers, social workers, home visitors, and health co-ordinators. Initially, Head Start did not require traditional academic qualifications in education or social work. In order to create a form of qualification more suited to the comprehensive service goals of Head Start, a national competency-based credential was developed in 197[illegible] specifically for Head Start workers: The Child Development Associate (CDA). Since that time, roughly 100 000 credentials have been granted both to Head Start employees, as well as to other centre staff and family child care providers. The CDA is now written into the licensing requirements of all but two states as one alternative way of qualifying for a post. Increasingly, candidates for the CDA are trained in community colleges. Community colleges are tertiary institutions offering the equivalent of the first two years of university education. In many Head Start programmes parents work on a voluntary basis (or at least, this was the case up to the introduction of the welfare reform act) and may be given the opportunity to receive professional training.

In 1997-1998, 29% of the staff in Head Start programmes were parents of current or former Head Start children. Over 808 000 parents volunteered in their local Head Start programme.

78. The U.S. Congress recently mandated a requirement that 50% of Head Start classroom staff have A.S. (2-year degree from a community college) or B.S. (4-year degree from a university) degrees by 2003. Ohio has even passed legislation which requires that all (100%) Head Start teachers must have an A.S. or a B.S. degree by the year 2006. This has policy implications for articulation between the CDA and college degree courses. All Head Start agencies are required to establish and implement a structured approach to staff training and development. 90% of Head Start teachers have one of the following: CDA credential, teacher's certificate in early childhood education, or bachelor's degree. In both Head Start and the purchase-of-service system there are many lead teachers who entered the field as aides and received their training after employment.

Staffing in the purchase-of-service system

79. Minimum standards for staff working in the market system of child care are regulated at the state level. These differ from state to state, and pre-service qualification requirements may be very low by professional standards. Illinois, for example, expects only two pre-service college courses, Minnesota requires 35 annual clock hours of training, and Michigan requires no training at all (Morgan, in preparation (b)). The qualifications of the staff responsible for a group of young children may range from someone with a master's degree (one or two year, post-bachelor's) or a four-year bachelor's degree to someone with a high school diploma. Facility licensing rules may require three different kinds of training: (1) pre-service training, (2) annual hours of ongoing (in-service) training, and/or (3) basic orientation (a brief induction period before assuming full role responsibility). Fifteen years ago, states seldom required any training for work as a family child care provider. Now, however, most states require a certain number of ongoing training hours per year.

80. A number of recent initiatives aim to raise the quality of staffing. Three such initiatives are: (1) A new scholarship programme called T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Program was developed in North Carolina in order to help individuals already working in the field to attend courses. The programme can be used by all levels of practitioners, who then commit themselves to stay in the setting that releases them for an agreed length of time, thus boosting the retention rate in these centres. Six further states have chosen to introduce this system as a means of raising basic quality standards in the field. Funding sources are mixed: federal (CCDF dollars for quality improvement), state, and private. T.E.A.C.H. is a non-profit service, with a built-in evaluation component. (2) The U.S. Department of Labor has introduced a 'Child development specialist' credential within an apprenticeship programme which involves working in a centre for two years under close supervision and taking two semesters of courses in child development at a community college. (3) A new accreditation for family child care homes, developed by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) was recently piloted and is generally considered to be a kind of credential for the family child care worker.

81. As an illustration of the variability of state requirements, the regulations for staff with group responsibility in early childhood centres in the three states visited are compared below (Table 10).

Table 10. Basic staffing requirements in 3 states

Colorado	Group leader: *Must be at least 18 and have a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university;* *or a 2 year college degree in child development or early childhood education from an accredited college or university;* *or current certification as a Child Development Associate (CDA) or Certified Childcare Professional (CCP) or other Department/approved credential;* *or completion of 2 years of college education with at least 1 college course in child development, plus 6 months (910 hours) of verified experience in the care and supervision of 4 or more children under 6 years of age who are not related to the individual;* *or 12 semester hours in college/level credits in the area of child growth and development and/or early childhood education, plus 9 months (1 395 hours) of verified experience in the care and supervision of 4 or more children under 6 years of age who are not related to the individual;* *or completion of a course of training approved by the Department that includes training and work experience with children;* *or completion of a vocational or occupational education sequence in child growth and development plus 12 months (1 820 hours) of verified experience in the care and supervision of 4 or more children under 6 years of age who are not related to the individual;* *or 36 months (5 460 hours) of verified experience in the care and supervision of 4 or more children under 6 years of age who are not related to the individual.*
North Carolina	Lead teachers and teachers: *If an individual already has a North Carolina Early Childhood Credential or its equivalent, none of the following requirements apply, otherwise lead teachers and teachers shall be:* *at least 18 years of age, have a high school diploma or its equivalent, and have at least one of the following:* *one year of verifiable child care experience working in a child care centre or two years of verifiable experience as a licensed family child care home operator: or* *successful completion of a two year high school Child Care Services Occupational Home Economics Program: or* *twenty hours of training in child development, which could include the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential coursework, within the first six months of employment in addition to the number of annual in-service training hours required* (e.g. 10 clock hours within the first six weeks of employment; 5 clock hours annually for persons with a four-year degree or higher advanced degree in a child care/related field of study; or 8 clock hours of training annually for persons with a two-year degree; or 10 clock hours of training annually for persons with a certificate or diploma in a child care-related field of study; or 15 clock hours for persons with at least 10 years documented, professional experience as a teacher, director, or caregiver in a licensed child care arrangement).
Ohio	Child Care Staff Member: *Must be at least 18 years old and have a high school degree or have completed a training programme approved by the Department of Human Services. Such approved programmes include a vocation education home economics course of a Child Care Job Training Program for Adults which must include completing 5 required and 3 elective courses for a total of 160 hours.*

Sources: National Child Care Information Center website, 1999; National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care website, 1999

Staffing in the public school system

82. Public school employees working with young children in the role of teacher (i.e. with class responsibility) generally have to hold a teacher license (teaching certificate) certified by the state. This license is based on a bachelor's degree and in some cases a master's degree with a specialisation in education. In some states, teacher certification is not required for teaching young children in a public school (and these employees are paid less than certified teachers). Only a few states require a practicum with children younger than school age for teacher certification. Teacher aides do not usually need pre-service qualifications, nor are they offered any specific training that might help them to progress professionally.

83. Table 11 gives an overview of the main types and levels of training for work with young children and the posts that persons with these qualifications *may* occupy within the three delivery systems. In practice, there may be wide variations as to how these credentials are valued in different states.

Table 11. Main types and levels of training and posts held in three delivery systems

Academic level	Description	Purchase-of-service	Head Start	Public schools
Basic orientation	On-site induction, no previous professional qualification	▸ Assistant Teacher ▸ Aide ▸ Family Child Care Provider	▸ Assistant Teacher ▸ Aide	Not applicable
One college course	Attendance for one semester at a post-secondary institution of a course with a child development or early education focus	▸ 'Teacher', i.e. group responsibility ▸ School-age programme group leader	▸ Home Visitor	Not applicable
Child Development Associate (CDA)	Equivalent to half a 2-year degree	▸ Lead Teacher	▸ Teacher	Not applicable
Department of Labor Credential	2 years on-site supervision, 2 semesters college specialising in child development	▸ Lead Teacher ('Child Development Specialist') ▸ Director, school-age programme	▸ Parent Co-ordinator	▸ (Assistant teacher)
Associate's Degree (A.A., A.S.)	2 year-degree from a community college	▸ Lead Teacher ▸ Director	▸ Director	▸ *Even Start* worker (federal literacy programme)
Bachelor's Degree (B.A., B.S.)	4 year-degree from a university	▸ Lead Teacher ▸ Director		▸ Provisional Teacher ▸ Teacher ▸ Program Director ▸ Principal
Master's Degree (M.A., M.S.)	1 or 2-year post-B.A., graduate degree	▸ Lead Teacher ▸ Director		▸ Teacher ▸ Program Director ▸ Principal

Source: Morgan, in preparation (b) (adapted)

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Continuing (in-service) training

84. Whereas standards for pre-service qualifications have hardly changed over the past two decades, there has been a significant trend for states to add requirements for ongoing training to their licensing requirements—and also an increasing awareness in the field that continual training is an important step towards professional development. The requirements for continuing (in-service) training differ within the three systems, and workers in the public school system have a very different starting point (usually a four-year degree) from the other two systems. Some states have started developing a credential for centre directors, but generally there is little preparation for management roles.

Remuneration and conditions of work

85. Wages of child care workers in the purchase-of-service system are on average extremely low. A report by the Center for the Child Care Workforce (Whitebook et al., 1998) states that most child care workers earn near poverty-level wages of under $13 000 per annum. Although centres have received more public funding over the last decade, workers' wages have stagnated. Assistants earn an average of $6 an hour, less than a parking-lot attendant ($6.38) or an employee in a fast-food restaurant. A 1995 study of Colorado child care centres found that assistants earned $5.66 per hour and lead teachers $7.27, whereas an elementary school teacher earned $17.03 and a jailer $13.73.

86. Not only are wages very low, but in many cases child care workers receive few, if any, employee health benefits or paid leave. Less than half of centre staff in the purchase-of-service system have fully covered health insurance. Taking into consideration the demands of the occupation, it is not surprising that staff turnover is very high. In Colorado childcare centres—according to the 1995 Cost, Quality and Outcomes study—the turnover rate is 41%, and in family child care homes 60%.

87. On a more positive note, Head Start's funding formula includes mandated allocations to increase staff compensation and fringe benefits; as a result, average teacher salaries increased from $14 600 in 1992 to $20 700 in 2000, and annual staff turnover was limited to 8-10%. Also, the 1998 study mentioned above found that programmes accredited by NAEYC pay higher wages to staff, report lower teacher turnover, and have retained twice as many staff over the past decade as non-accredited programmes.

Gender

88. As in most European countries, practitioners in the ECEC field in the U.S. are almost exclusively women; men account for only 3% of the workforce. There are no public policies which take a clear stance on supporting a more mixed gender workforce. The whole issue has been overshadowed by apparent public mistrust of men working with young children; myths and allegations of sexual abuse are a proving to be very real barrier towards creating an occupational field that is open to men.

Recent collaborative policy initiatives at the state and local/community level

89. As a reaction to the dual challenges of expanding and raising the quality of ECEC provision, a number of community initiatives—some reaching state-wide dimensions—have started up and flourished over the past few years. Three of these forward-looking initiatives are described below: the North Carolina Early Childhood Initiative 'Smart Start', the 'Educare Colorado' coalition along with the 'Colorado Early Childhood Summit', and the Ohio state initiative 'Ohio Family and Children First'.

Box 2. SMART START — North Carolina Early Childhood Initiative

SMART START is a collaborative initiative between state government and partners at the local level. These include representatives of the business community, service providers, families, and community and religious leaders. The initiative's self-designated aim is "to help all North Carolina children enter school healthy and ready to succeed." Launched in 1993 by the state governor, Smart Start was one of the first collaborative efforts set up to improve the quality and management of services for children under age 6 and their families. Smart Start activities are co-ordinated by a non-profit corporation (North Carolina Partnership for Children) established to administer state funds specifically for this purpose.

Smart Start is not "just another programme" or single intervention. Instead, it is a community-based, comprehensive, public-private initiative which provides a framework for pooling resources, developing plans to match the needs of local communities, and providing affordable and accessible education and preventive health services for children and families. At present, Smart Start is operated in more than half the state's 100 counties, and the goal is to ensure universal provision for those families who need and require it. Funding sources are both private and public. State allocations have increased from $20 million in 1993 to $220 million in the 1999-2000 fiscal year. Approximately 70% of funds are used to extend and improve provision (including the training of practitioners), and approximately 30% are used to assist families in purchasing the child care they choose, either in a licensed centre or a registered family child care home.

North Carolina has one of the highest proportion (67%) of working mothers in the U.S. The core services of Smart Start are: improving the quality of programmes; making child care available; making child care accessible supporting families who need services; providing comprehensive services including health, care and education.

90. In a meeting with Smart Start representatives the review team was told that Smart Start has: generated incredible energy and engagement; brought together agencies who had never worked together before; helped to integrate services that were previously working alongside one another; involved the business community; involved the parents of young children; helped teachers to become better educated; reduced staff turnover rate (in collaboration with the training initiative T.E.A.C.H.). In the words of one representative: "Smart Start is a new way to solve a problem—it is not crisis-oriented." One of the most recent initiatives is the introduction of a new Five-Star evaluation procedure. All centres are subject to rating through state employees. If accredited, and depending on their rating (one star, two stars, etc.), centre staff receive improved health insurance benefits, bonuses, and more opportunities for continuing education/training. However, stipulating the level of parental fees is up to the individual service, which suggests that centres in high income neighbourhoods can raise more money and are, thus, better equipped to reach a high star level.

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Box 3. Educare Colorado, Colorado Early Childhood Summit, and Consolidated Child Care Pilot Project

EDUCARE COLORADO was formed in 1997 as a coalition of business, philanthropic, political and community leaders to establish a high-quality and economically viable, universal early education system. It is a private initiative and does not receive public money. The motives for forming this coalition were threefold: (1) The number of children in child care settings in Colorado is rising steadily, accounting for 75% of children under six in some counties. Projections for the year 2005 expect up to 83% of women in their child-raising years to be working outside the home. (2) New knowledge on the 'windows of opportunities' during the early years of life underline the importance of a stimulating and responsive learning environment during these years. (3) According to a four-state study published in 1995, 87% of child care in Colorado was considered to be mediocre to poor, with 20% of that care being downright unsafe for children. In effect, this means that the working parents of about 100 000 children are vying for a mere 13 000 quality child care slots, even if they are in a position to pay for that care. In order to address this situation, the stated vision of Educare Colorado is: "to create a universal early child care and education system in Colorado that: provides high-quality, child-centred care; involves parents as teachers and decision-makers; is fully funded and permanently sustainable; is appropriately monitored and evaluated." Educare is a non-profit organisation designed to be market-driven (by parental choice) and to be accountable for its impact on children, families and the community at large. Four implementation steps are proposed and partly under way: (1) designing and implementing a public awareness campaign; (2) establishing quality standards; (3) establishing full funding for universal child care; (4) developing a comprehensive evaluation plan. Educare Colorado is one of the resource participants of The Colorado Early Childhood Summit.

The COLORADO EARLY CHILDHOOD SUMMIT is a non-partisan coalition representing Colorado's largest early childhood membership associations who regularly work together with state legislators, the Governor's Policy Office, state departments and child advocates to speak as a whole on legislative and other issues that impact on children's lives. The Summit has developed a Colorado Early Childhood Care and Education Three Year Plan, 1999-2001.

In 1997, the Colorado General Assembly established the CONSOLIDATED CHILD CARE PILOTS to help local communities to begin to address their critical needs for full-day, full-year child care services as a partner to welfare reform. Twelve communities were designated as pilots. Pilots were required to: (1) Consolidate state funding sources and, where possible, local and federal sources to create a seamless system; (2) Ensure collaboration among public and private stakeholders in the delivery of early childhood care and education; (3) Include programme components consistent with quality; (4) Be responsive for the needs of working parents. Pilot communities could request waivers that would remove barriers preventing them from implementing the pilot projects. A total of 64 waivers have been granted to programmes to allow for increased local flexibility e.g., to be exempt from certain rules and regulation (e.g. child care facility staffing patterns) or to re-allocate existing funding to meet highest need.

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Box 4. Ohio Family and Children First

OHIO FAMILY AND CHILDREN FIRST is a multi-agency, state-wide initiative, codified in 1993, which promotes co-ordination and collaboration among state government and local government, non-profit organisations, businesses, and families. A cabinet council, chaired by the Governor, has members across government departments. Each of Ohio's 88 counties have voluntarily created a Family and Children First Council, which receives a small amount of funding ($20 000 annually) as support for staff, parent stipends, training needs, and strategic planning retreats. Members of the councils include families (consumers), Head Start grantees, non-profit providers, judges, county commissioners, and other parties interested in "improving results for children." The self-formulated key objectives of the initiative are: assuring that infants are healthier; increasing access to quality pre-school and child care for families desiring enrolment; improving services to aid family stability. Ten regional co-ordinators work directly with the local councils on issues such as governance, programme design, evaluation, recruitment and engagement of family members, and programme management. Under this umbrella a number of specific programmes are operated. These are: (1) *Early Start*, as from 1999 a state-wide early intervention programme to identify and support 'at risk' infants and toddlers by providing linkages with existing services and supporting new services, such as home visiting and parenting education. The programme is jointly administered by the state health and the state human services departments. At the local level it is operated by a variety of public and non-profit agencies selected by the local council. (2) *Help me Grow*, a state-wide health promotion programme on the importance of early and consistent pre-natal and post-natal baby care. (3) *Welcome Home*, a home visit programme for all first time parents and all teen parents who volunteer for the service. (4) *Wellness Block Grant*, a programme to reduce teenage pregnancy rates and to reduce rates of substantiated child abuse and neglect. (5) *Family Stability Incentive Fund*, a programme to reduce the number of out-of-home placements of multi-need children and youth by 25% over three years in selected sites. (6) *School Readiness Resource Centers* are school-linked and/or school-based centres designed to remove non-cognitive barriers to children's learning. (7) *The Parent Leadership Training Institute* seeks to encourage parents to become involved in civic government and public life to benefit their families and community. The 20-week course integrates child development, leadership and democracy skills into a parent curriculum. (8) *State Choice* is a cross-agency programme to share support for children and youth with multiple needs (e.g. child protection services, the juvenile course, and mental health). (9) *Interdepartmental Licensing Initiative* is an effort to simplify and co-ordinate the licensing and certification process for agencies and organisations that provide substitute care for children and youth.

91. A further initiative in Ohio is the Ohio Head Start Collaboration Project, one of a network of 52 Head Start-State Collaboration Offices created nation-wide to increase the state "presence" of Head Start. In Ohio, one individual is funded to serve as a state liaison between agencies and individuals carrying out Head Start programmes. A major aim is to ensure that the collaboration involves co-ordination of Head Start services with health care, welfare, child care, education, national service, family literacy services, activities relating to children with disabilities, and services to the homeless population. The current focus of these liaison measures is on issues of professional development, improving facilities, infant/toddler services, and improving technology and evaluation. This link person reports back to the Governor through the Ohio Families and Children First Initiative.

92. These initiatives at the state and local level exemplify some of the diverse and innovative approaches to ECEC that can be found in the U.S. Each effort is community-based and aims to raise quality and access, in collaboration with both public and private providers. These initiatives may give lessons for addressing the challenges in the field. The next chapter will explore some of these challenges in further detail.

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CHAPTER 5: ISSUES ARISING FROM THE REVIEW VISIT

93. Over the last decade, and especially during the past five years, there has been a notable, even dramatic increase in government involvement in ECEC policy goals and implementation—both at the federal level and at the state level. It was clear to us during the visit that there is a great deal of dedication and enthusiasm among those working in the early childhood field to build on this positive attention to the early childhood period and to translate these new policies and initiatives into successful practice. Equally clear was the concern among our American colleagues that although there has been some progress recently, there are many remaining challenges to be addressed in the years to come in order to ensure that children have access to quality early childhood experiences. In a spirit of support and professional dialogue, the reviewers offer their outsiders' perceptions on five broad issue areas for further consideration:

- responsibility of federal and state government for ECEC policy goals and implementation;
- diverse provision, regulation and funding of early childhood education and care;
- quality improvement, innovation and research;
- access to early childhood services;
- staffing, staff training and professional development.

94. The above issues were all identified by U.S. experts, both in the Background Report and during the review visit. They are also issues which concern all three states visited and thus give some indication of the challenges with which the nation as a whole is grappling. At the end of the chapter, we comment on three additional issues that were not explicitly mentioned during the visit, but, from the team's perspective, are important to consider if policy and provision in the U.S. is to be improved. The team is well aware that since many of these involve deep cultural attitudes and traditions, they need to be addressed over time, with a great deal of sensitivity.

Responsibility of federal and state government for ECEC policy goals and implementation

95. The federal government through the U.S. Congress is in a position to formulate general ECEC policies and goals and to facilitate the state role in the implementation of education and care programmes according to regional and local needs. Policy initiatives at the federal level—as previously stated—have until now primarily focused on targeted populations, in particular on low-income families and children with special needs. Recent proposals at the federal level have included significant investments in child care subsidies, tax credits for families and businesses, an Early Learning Fund to enhance child development, and support for after-school care. An additional $172 million in new money has been made available to help states improve the quality of child care. There have also been moves to provide a national focus on child care (e.g. through the establishment of the DHSS Child Care Bureau (1995) and National Child Care

Information Center (NCCIC). At the state level, policy decisions focus on questions of access and eligibility, demand and supply, allocation and benefits, and the scope and quality of services.

96. Whereas in the early history of ECEC policy goals both at federal and state level tended to focus on child protection, during more recent years they have generally been linked to three separate, but complementary 'movements' (Cochran, in preparation). These are: early intervention, child care, and family support. Early intervention programmes—dating back to the compensatory education movement of the 1960s—are still manifest today in the form of Head Start and diverse home visiting programmes. The child care movement expanded in the 1970s in line with the rising number of mothers entering the work force, and has gathered further momentum from the recent changes in welfare legislation at both federal and state level. The family support movement developed in the 1980s, emphasising an empowerment approach in contrast to prevailing family assistance policies. In each of these areas there has been significant growth over the past decade. Each has seen the development of numerous 'programmes' designed to address specific problems within the field. However, the overall landscape is becoming increasingly complex, and policymakers are on the whole addressing these three arenas separately.

97. The result is a fragmented and uneven approach. In the words of one researcher: "The U.S. is faced with the legacy of a patchwork approach to policy in early education and care." At the local level, this can and often does lead to competition between the various groups, who are essentially vying for the same funding at both state and federal level. In consequence, important issues become blurred for the general public, and support for a particular movement tends to be sectional. At the same time, at least in some states, official agencies (e.g. Head Start-State Collaboration Offices) have been actively forging links between sectors. These local collaboration efforts receive a certain amount of federal support (e.g. funding initiatives, technical assistance, convening partners), and federal agencies are at present drafting policy to make these linkages easier. In some cases, state education departments have attempted to provide links between the different arenas—in particular through the establishment of state-funded pre-kindergartens. However, the umbrella term 'pre-kindergarten' camouflages a wide diversity of provision. Only in a few cases are overarching concerns (such as supporting literacy development both in centres and in families) addressed consistently across these fields, with attempts to link up initiatives at the regional level.

98. From our visits to Colorado, North Carolina and Ohio, we became aware of the vital role of political leadership—particularly at the governor level—in stating a vision, setting priorities and initiating the advancement of coherent policies. If this is then combined with effective state intervention policies which support and draw on strong community movements (as, for example, in the case of the Smart Start initiative in North Carolina), important steps can be made towards creating a more co-ordinated and high quality system of ECEC services.

99. In these three states, where innovative ECEC policies are under way, community leaders stressed the continuing need for public awareness campaigns. One policy expert claimed that in her state, "Young children don't even come into the top 10 big issues." Not only is political will important, but also public support for early education and care. One practitioner expressed her view on this as follows: "The U.S. looks at childcare as babysitting, on workers as teenagers with teenage-wages. What they really think is that children should be at home with mammy." Parents, and all other members of the voting population, need to be made more fully aware of the importance of quality services for young children—an issue which becomes all the more urgent as the relative number of children in the overall population declines. The spokesman of a national professional organisation put it this way: "There are more voters than parents with children, so we need to convince the public of the importance for society." An active and articulate research community has done much to promote the cause (e.g. through the *Quality 2000 Initiative* documented by Kagan & Cohen, 1997), though there are still many gaps between research findings and public policy.

100. This raises some important questions about the 'balance of power' concerning policy goals and policy implementation. The federal government has had a kind of equalising role up to now. Policy priorities have been targeted at areas which—from a federal standpoint—have not been sufficiently addressed at the state level. The question is: should the federal government take a more leading role in universal goal setting and in facilitating implementation at the state level? Furthermore, how can the federal government get individual states to feel more responsible for the development of state-wide, co-ordinated policies on early childhood education and care? As state influence grows, balances are shifting at the local level and the need for effective co-ordination is growing. How can the federal level, the state level and the local level complement one another more effectively? Who decides which programmes will be supported and how the funding is to be distributed? Who will take the lead in raising awareness and campaigning for quality at the local level?

101. It seems that the policy vacuum is linked to the fairly widespread sense of mistrust against too much government intervention in the USA. Government intervention is viewed as interfering with the rights and responsibilities of parents, and is only considered justifiable when the family is deemed 'in need.' This helps to explain why, historically, ECEC policies have targeted 'at-risk', poor, or abused children. Whereas it is generally accepted that children aged five or six years deserve an education at public expense (although kindergarten still has no federal mandate), this view does not hold in the same way for younger children. It still appears to be commonly assumed that they are better off at home. At the same time, this assumption is not translated into tangible regulations and financial compensation which enable parents to take care of their children at home. On the contrary, the welfare reform act and the lack of paid parental leave legislation mean that most parents with young children do not have the option to stay at home. Policy continues to treat the family as a self-reliant entity, economically self-contained, supportive and nurturing. Given the knowledge that we have about young children's learning capacities in the early years, it is surprising that providing support for the educational role of the family is not considered an issue for society at large, and not just for individual families. In this respect, the U.S. stance differs from that in most other OECD countries, where the youngest children are viewed as society's collective responsibility.

Diverse provision, regulation and funding of early education and care

Diverse provision

102. Early childhood services in the U.S. are provided by a combination of market and publicly-provided systems. The dominant market system includes all privately-run (non-profit and for-profit) purchase-of-service centres and family child care homes. Publicly-provided services includes Head Start, kindergartens, and pre-kindergartens. As previously noted, different regulatory and funding policies apply within each system. For the review team, this raises a number of issues, both about within-system and across-system diversity and variability.

103. *Head Start* (for three and four year olds) and *Early Head Start* (for infants and toddlers) provide a wide range of services aiming to meet the needs of individual children and families in a community context. It is this wide range of services which is one of the major assets of the Head Start system, and the quality of Head Start provision is rated by experts as being higher than that of average child care centres. However, Head Start centres are attended mainly by four year olds, and are mostly open half-day. Eligibility is restricted to a certain age group and the great majority of children who actually attend Head Start have access to the programme only part-day and part-year. The programme can therefore be described as a targeted and time-restricted intervention for a specific age and population group, not, however, as a comprehensive educational programme conceptualised around two or three years' attendance (as in many European countries). Early Head Start, too, is often a part-time programme, for three to four hours a day, five days a week (although there is a trend towards programmes working with child care agencies to

provide full-day/full-year services). The question is: What happens to those children whose parents are not able to provide care at home for the remainder of the day? We were told that whereas formerly (before welfare reform) parents were involved in the Head Start programmes, some as teaching assistants, most are now working and cannot participate in the ways that the programme originally conceived. The structure of provision then becomes an issue—and this format varies greatly. Sometimes the various types of services that the child has to attend are located in separate facilities, sometimes two different providers are involved on one particular site, and only occasionally are services fully integrated on the same premises. In recognition of these trends, Head Start is implementing a major initiative to expand full-day/full-year services through partnerships with other early childhood programmes and funding sources.

104. This within-system variability is even more marked in the *purchase-of-service system*, although full-day care is a fairly consistent feature of provision. We should like to share some observations, well aware that they are not necessarily applicable to other settings across the nation. We visited a number of centres that are operated by for-profit child care chains, with funding from individual firms and companies. Here we noticed the advantages of a steady flow of capital. In our talks with the staff in these corporate child care centres, we learned that these practitioners were highly qualified practitioners, often holding a four-year degree. We noticed that much consideration had gone into planning space, furniture and material resources. We registered the cheerful colours, the light, the space. Parent contributions were kept considerably lower than in other centres, being subsidised by the firm/company in question. This kind of provision has the advantage of being able to offer high quality facilities at a reasonable cost for parents. However, it is only available for a very small, select population group, namely the employees in the company concerned. Other for-profit centres we visited varied greatly in quality and resources. As far as the not-for-profit centres are concerned, many of the staff we met were extremely motivated and committed to children and families. They had a clear vision to guide their daily work. Yet, we had the impression that in general they seem to be rather poorly equipped in terms of staffing, appropriate rooms and equipment, as if they are "struggling to make ends meet" because of limited resources. In terms of programme content, the purchase-of-service system offers the whole range of possibilities: traditional nursery school, Reggio-inspired practice, programmes stressing academic skills, and so on.

105. The extent of *public system provision* (kindergarten for five to six year olds in schools, pre-kindergarten mainly for four year olds) depends on the level of state commitment. Opening hours are generally part-day, sometimes with different groups of children in the mornings and the afternoons. In some cases wrap-around care facilities are offered. In one such centre we visited, we were told that many children are on site for up to 12 hours, which is an extremely long day for young children. Programme orientation in publicly-funded provision seemed on the whole to be predominantly literacy and numeracy based, whereby methods of instruction and learning varied. However, we did see other examples. In Ohio, for example, we visited a group in a public school kindergarten class where the teacher was in the process of adapting the curriculum to include aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach—part of an innovative project initiated by the state Department of Education. Also in Ohio, a small number of public pre-schools integrate children with disabilities. The following vignette describes impressions from a visit to such a centre.

Box 5. An Inclusive ECEC Centre in Ohio

Wide windows, walls in a soft yellow, space, activity corners. In each classroom the children are engrossed in various activities. In one they are in dialogue with a teacher showing pictures and telling a story in an interactive way. In another it is free-choice time, and the teacher is very much involved with individual children. The teachers are not alone. There are all kinds of specialists at hand in the classroom. The children do not need to 'go to therapy', the experts come to them. Parents are encouraged to join in classroom activities—and, yes, they are there, at the same time learning a lot by observing the interaction of teachers and specialists with their child. 50% of the children are not 'special needs' children. Part of the inclusive philosophy is to have balanced, mixed groups. There is a waiting list for non-special education children in the neighbourhood. Pre-school staff assist parents in making an appropriate choice at the transition stage to compulsory schooling. They are also involved in helping public schools in the whole county to cope with the demands of children with special needs in regular classrooms. The staff are adequately trained, some have a masters degree, and staff turnover is low. They are serving a group of children in need as well as a whole community.

106. With the current expansion of state pre-kindergarten programmes (Schulman et al., 1999), a number of tensions are beginning to emerge between the purchase-of-service system and the public system. If pre-kindergartens should be introduced in a universal way (until now a policy commitment only in New York State and in Georgia), there is concern from child care centres that they may 'lose' their four to five year olds. Privately-run centres often make up for the expense of caring for infants and toddlers with the fees they receive for the older children, and if public pre-kindergarten is offered only in schools, some centres may be forced out of business. On the other hand, many publicly-funded pre-kindergarten programmes contract with ECEC providers in the non-profit (e.g., Bright Beginnings described in Chapter 4) and for-profit sector (e.g., Georgia). In addition, there may be opportunities for schools to link up with other early childhood settings for wrap-around or out-of-school provision for children of working parents. In other words, broadening state commitment to ECEC would not necessarily threaten the financial situation of providers in the private sector.

107. In summary, there are many different kinds of provision serving different groups of the population. Some are open full-day, some only part-day, and many children may be attending different types of care within one day. ECEC provision is staffed by practitioners with varying levels of education and training, and there are great differences in terms of resources, materials, equipment, and space. Much of this provision is very costly for families, particularly for the parents of younger children. Diversity can be stimulating, and choice for parents desirable. Both are possible within the U.S., within one state, even within one neighbourhood. However, this approach has its price. This diversity also reflects gross inequality, it reflects inequity of access and competition among providers for funds, it generates high quality programmes for those who can pay, for those who are aware of the need for an intellectually stimulating and emotionally responsive environment for their children, and it generates programmes of shockingly low quality for those who also have to pay, but cannot pay so much, who maybe do not know what to expect of good provision, or have little time and little information with which to navigate this sea of programmes. The central question is: how to combine the strengths of U.S. provision—diversity, innovation, community-based approaches—with equal opportunities and quality for *all* children?

Regulation

108. Regulatory procedures at the state level focus primarily on the purchase-of-service system, and here the Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies play a valuable linkage role between providers, parents and state agencies. To date, five states require national accreditation (e.g. through the NAEYC accreditation system) of providers participating in state pre-kindergarten programmes, and three states encourage programmes to have national accreditation (Mitchell et al., 1998). In the states we visited, we heard from various sources that embarking on the accreditation process is a very positive starting point for

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team building, reflective practice and centre development. Accreditation also gives parents an indication of the quality of the setting. However, since the accreditation process is voluntary for the most part, only a minimal number of centres are engaged in this kind of professional development. The five-point scale system adopted by North Carolina is a new approach towards encouraging centres to strive for the 'next step up' in order to receive more resources.

109. In contrast to the voluntary accreditation process, regulatory enforcement of ECEC in the U.S. appears to emphasise compliance of rules and requirements, rather than technical assistance (Gormley, 2000). What we heard from the field is not only that certain regulations restrict the implementation of innovative practice, but that inspectors are viewed as external assessors who tend to intervene for punitive reasons, not necessarily to support providers. For programme administrators, negotiating and adhering to the different regulations under which they may operate can be a confusing and time-consuming task. In a centre in Ohio which was experimenting with mixed-age grouping (for children ages 0-3 and 3-6) we were surprised to learn that there is a health regulation which prevents 'diapered' and 'non-diapered' children being in the same group. Although the centre was convinced of the value of mixed-age groups—and wanted to experiment with an even larger age-mix—they were not free to put this idea into practice. In certain centres we were told that the outdoor playgrounds were age-segregated, or that certain rooms (e.g. a 'soft' room with cushions and equipment for gross motor play) were only to be used by a specific age-group because of fears of infection or safety risks. This suggests a need for modifying regulations so that they ensure children's basic health and safety, but do not inhibit providers from pedagogical experimentation. Colorado's Consolidated Child Care Project is one interesting approach to overcoming barriers to providing quality comprehensive services for young children (see Chapter 3).

Funding

110. Throughout the visit, funding emerged as a consistent and dominant theme. Policy-makers and administrators, programme providers and practitioners all seemed to be equally conversant with funding sources and with funding distribution. This is, basically, because the financing of early childhood provision is such an essential issue and by no means guaranteed. Two comments that we heard over and again in different guises were: "This system of funding does not work" and "Now is a good time, but what happens if the economy weakens?" At the level of individual settings trying to work innovatively—or even just to survive—it became plaintively clear from our site visits that far too much time is being spent trying to secure money from the various funding sources. Many centre directors, particularly in the non-profit sector, are involved in masses of paperwork just in order to keep their centres in existence, and this valuable time is time *not* spent on the central tasks of their professional work—work with and for children and their families.

111. From a funding point of view, parents and households are expected to cover a very high proportion of ECEC costs—as noted in the previous chapter. This mismatch between public and private responsibility reflects deeply ingrained attitudes concerning individual and collective responsibility when it comes to the upbringing and education of young children. These are still predominantly seen as private tasks to be managed by individual families (i.e. mothers), and not as issues which demand consistent and explicit public commitment. Moreover, funding affects parents unevenly as low-income families pay a higher percentage of their income for services than their higher-income counterparts. Children's access to quality services is strongly correlated with their families' ability to pay. To some extent, child care staff are subsidising the full costs of ECEC though their low wages, which has led to high rates of turnover in the field (CQCO Study Team, 1995).

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112. In 11 states (mostly in the south, where the number of young families eligible for welfare assistance is particularly high) there is no state funding for either pre-kindergartens or Head Start. Where public commitment towards funding does exist at the state level, a further cause for concern are the gross inequities between states. One researcher reported on a recently completed study in six states in the north-east of the U.S. which shows that state funding accounts for only 5% of all ECEC funding in one of the states, whereas in another it accounts for 57%. Even 57% is minimal if comparisons are drawn with countries like France or Belgium, where a considerably higher proportion of public money is spent on supporting a stable ECEC system (at least for children from the age of 30 months upwards).

113. Despite the increased commitment at government level generally, one of the major issues seems to be centred around the following question: should states give the money they receive from federal sources (e.g. from the Child Care and Development Fund) directly to families in the form of child care subsidies, or should it be used to create and support a stable infrastructure for services for young children and their families? Although the arguments for a coherent and well-resourced *system* of ECEC provision have been clearly stated by researchers (e.g. in the *Not by Chance* report), most states still opt for child care subsidies, reflecting a preference for a predominantly demand-driven system and individual choice at the family/private level rather than direct government intervention through the supply and support of services. However, a demand-driven system only works in a more or less perfect market. The market in the U.S. is currently far from perfect: buyers lack both financial resources and full information on quality and accessibility. This suggests a need for supply-side investment—direct support to programmes to improve their quality according to nationally-recognised standards.

Quality improvement, innovation and research

114. The review team was able to experience a wide variety of learning environments during the site visits. In some we felt comfortable and assured, convinced that the children were 'getting a good deal'. These were centres where there was plenty of daylight and space for the children to move freely and in different ways, where activity areas were clearly defined (but not necessarily by a label announcing the 'reading corner'), where children were clearly involved in their activities, where the staff had a good standard of professional training and displayed a reflective and compassionate attitude towards the complex issues of working with young children and their families, where there was ample evidence of pedagogical documentation on projects of interest for both children and parents, where there was evidence of 'balancing' the curriculum, and also of balancing group composition (as far as the regional situation allowed) to reflect differences in ethnicity, family structure, age, economic status, and so on. In other environments we felt concerned, and in some cases alarmed: children in cramped spaces, in rooms with a disturbingly high noise level, in dark basement rooms with all-day electric lighting, in one case with no windows at all, in same-age groups with no contact between children of different ages, in some cases without sufficient materials to manipulate, in others with an over-abundance of ready-made, streamlined, standardised commercial materials.

115. We were particularly concerned about the low quality of some of the provision for infants and toddlers. In North Carolina, in the mid-1990s, between 60 and 70% of services for two year olds and under were considered below the acceptable quality level (CQCO Study Team, 1995). Despite the many efforts to improve quality state-wide (especially through the Smart Start initiative), we nevertheless saw some disturbing examples of low quality in the three states we visited. In one centre (not-for-profit, independent, church-based) we saw children from six weeks up to two years in a tiny room, overcrowded with toys, with little space for the children to crawl or walk, individual children sitting in chairs, without contact and stimulation. In another setting, a family child care home, eight children aged one to four years were in a basement with one small skylight, the television was on all the time in the background, several children

appeared not to be involved in any kind of activity, and the assistant present was not interacting with the children. This was a full-time service costing parents $100 per week.

116. In our site-visits we found—across sub-systems—a predominance of programme content and implementation that was on the whole age-restricted (same-age groups, sometimes with variations of only a few months), seemingly adult-centred, and generally oriented more towards instructive (rather than experiential, discovery-oriented) learning. Many focused particularly on functional skills centred around a narrow definition of 'school readiness'. We are of course not sure if what we saw is representative of curriculum focus across the nation—and we are aware that there are many programmes that adopt a more balanced approach, such as those trying to integrate certain aspects of the Reggio Emilia philosophy into their work. However, the main emphasis seemed to be an instructivist approach.

117. The U.S. produces the most influential body of research world-wide in the ECEC field. The major focus of early childhood research in recent years has moved from a general consideration of the impact of early care and education programmes on child growth and 'outcomes' to questions about the impact of programmes of varying quality on children's development, and about the interdependence between family environments and early childhood settings. Research knowledge about individual quality indicators (e.g. staff education and training, staff-child ratios, group size) is influencing policy initiatives at the national, state, and local level (Cochran, in preparation). NGOs such as NAEYC play a central and valuable role in helping to promote research evidence and professional development. Guidelines (which from a non-U.S.-perspective may appear somewhat prescriptive at times), position statements and other documents stimulate professional debate and advance understanding in the field. These documents tend to focus on different aspects of programme quality or on training (rather less on the system as a whole), and they are having a significant and positive impact on the system. This is particularly evident with regard to the voluntary accreditation system, introduced some 15 years ago, which sets standards considerably higher than the basic requirements set down by states and toward which an increasing number of programmes and states are encouraging centres to aspire.

118. Moreover, in 2000, for the first time, federal funds ($10 million) were designated for child care research and evaluation, with the aim of building an infrastructure for research at the federal, state, and local levels and pinpointing relevant research issues.

Access to early childhood services

119. In contrast to most other advanced industrialised societies, the provision of early childhood education for young children is not based on the notion of statutory entitlement or universal access. Large numbers of children are *not* eligible for any form of government-funded provision. The state of Georgia (where lottery funds are used to finance ECEC provision) and the state of New York are the only governments to have made a recent pledge concerning universal coverage for four year olds. Policy has prioritised risk factors, and each programme has its own eligibility criteria. Not only is provision selective, it also fails to reach all those belonging to the designated groups. In an average month in fiscal year 1998, only 1.5 million children received Child Care and Development Fund subsidies. This is a mere 10% of the children that are income-eligible under federal criteria. To illustrate the extent of inequity of access, in 1996, only 45 percent of three- to five-year old children from low-income families were enrolled in pre-school programmes, compared with almost three-quarters of children from high-income families (National Education Goals Panel, 1997). Targeting populations within the constraints of limited funding then becomes a problem of targeting the 'right' population. Within the framework of the declared goal of establishing strengthening the foundations of lifelong learning *for all* as expressed by the OECD Education Ministers (OECD, 1996), this is a policy orientation that clearly needs to be reassessed.

120. Head Start, for example, despite budgetary increases over the years, reaches only about 40% of all eligible children (i.e. those in a family whose income is below the federal poverty line). The nine-month, half-day format is ill-suited to the needs of many families needing full-day, full-year services. Even though many programmes offer two years of service for three and four year olds, it is predominantly a one-year program for four year olds (roughly 10% of all 4 year olds are in Head Start). Overall, in 1998, 36% of enrolled children were African American, 33% white, non-Hispanic, 24% Hispanic, 4% Native American, 3% Asian. 13.2% of the enrolled children had disabilities. A federal regulation states that each classroom must have one staff member who can speak the language of the majority of children in the classroom, and during one particular site visit we were told that this requirement is beginning to strain Head Start resources. In many cases there is just no extra money to hire staff from (mostly Spanish speaking) ethnic minorities.

121. A recent survey of state-funded pre-school initiatives across the nation (Ripple et al, 1999) concluded that there is a high level of variability in what states offer their pre-school populations.

> *...each state has its own unique demography, geography, funding structure, political climate and ideology, and administrative style...the state-to-state variability in pre-school programming results in a patchwork of requirements and services... (and) the quality and availability of state-funded pre-school for poor children depends on where the family lives: if they are in Georgia, they are in luck, but if they are across the state line living in Alabama, they are not.*

122. It would seem necessary to establish common agreement on at least some basic requirements, such as goals, minimum training level of staff and the minimum level of per capita dollar allocation for each child. Even the state-designated age for compulsory schooling varies widely across states. Whereas in the European Union, six has become the most common age for entering the compulsory public school system, according to NAEYC data (1995) this is the case in only 22 states in the U.S. Compulsory school attendance ranges from age five (in seven states) to age eight (in two states). Although the vast majority of children are in either public or private kindergarten at age five, we were surprised that there is no apparent debate around this inconsistency across states and the possible implications for access and equity.

123. Inequities are even more pronounced in the dominant private sector. Parents who can pay the necessary fees or who receive subsidies from their employers are in a position to gain access to good quality programmes. Many low and moderate income working families fall through the cracks, with incomes not low enough to be eligible for a CCDF subsidy, yet too low to get an appreciable amount of help from the Dependent Care Tax Credit. These families—who on the one hand do not have the means to pay high fees, on the other hand earn more than is needed to qualify for publicly-funded services—are missing out in terms of early childhood education and care. This means there is a large 'gap group' for whom quality, affordability and accessibility are interrelated variables that need to be addressed simultaneously.

124. The Armed Services provides a model of a successful coherent and co-ordinated approach towards ECEC. Over the past ten years, the Military Child Care Act (1989) has created a framework for policy development for one of the largest employer-sponsored programmes in the world. This is a large-scale programme that is adequately funded, that addresses quality, that has reasonable personnel policies, and which is planned to be made accessible to *all* children within the system (Morgan, in preparation (b)).

Staffing, staff training and professional development

125. There has been significant progress toward increasing the awareness of importance of staff training and professional development for quality ECEC. As a result of extensive research and advocacy over the past two decades, states have added requirements for ongoing training to their licensing requirements; most states now require a certain number of ongoing training hours per year for family day care providers. Head Start will soon require that 50% of Head Start classroom staff have a higher education degree. Despite this progress, the staffing of early childhood education and care is one of the most serious issues facing the efforts to expand provision across the U.S. There are not nearly enough qualified persons available; state requirements in the largest segment of ECEC—the purchase-of-service system—vary from state to state, and are generally of a low professional standard; there is no co-ordinated framework of training across delivery systems; there are no inter-state agreements on how individual qualifications shall be valued or weighted; staff earn very low wages; turnover is in many centres very high; lead staff have little additional administrative or management training. Some of the central issues at hand, then, are issues of initial and continuing training, of articulation within and across states, of staff recruitment and staff retention, and of staff licensing.

126. There are distinct differences between the three delivery systems (Head Start, purchase-of-service, public school system) in the required qualifications expected of staff taking on group responsibility for young children. The public school system has the highest requirements, followed by Head Start. The lowest requirements are for work in the purchase-of-service system, although the differences within this system range enormously from state to state. There also appears to be only minimal consensus in the field about the required basic standards for working as a lead teacher. Should the baseline be the CDA, a two-year college degree, or a four-year baccalaureate degree? Only one or two of the NGO officials we met stated clearly that the CDA should be the basic minimum requirement.

127. An associated issue here is the fact that the same credentials are weighted differently in different states. In Hawaii, for example, the CDA is a way of qualifying staff to become teacher aides, whereas in 18 other states it qualifies to direct a centre. In Colorado it is one of the requirements for the post of group leader. From a professional viewpoint, qualifications such as the CDA, that are based on performance standards and not on a solid basis of underpinning knowledge for work in the field, tend to be seen critically. Whereas such competence-based qualification systems represent one important way of raising the qualifications level as a whole, it is questionable as to whether the knowledge base required is sufficiently broad, balanced and in-depth to meet the diverse challenges and demands of working with young children and their families.

128. That is not to say that four-year degrees necessarily hold all the right answers. Many four-year degree courses offered in public colleges for work in the public school system are geared to public school teacher certification requirements, and consequently focus on teaching expertise for five to eight year olds (K through 3rd grade) rather than on work with younger children and their families, or on the needs of school-age children in out-of-school time. In European countries where the training of pre-school teachers is combined with that of primary school teachers (e.g. in France or in The Netherlands), similar problems have been noted: time spent on learning about the early years tends to lose out to the weightier status of compulsory schooling (Oberhuemer & Ulich, 1997). Also, we were told that the coursework in the four-year degrees tends to be organised around subject areas (science, maths, etc.), while two-year degrees are more likely to approach early childhood pedagogy from an integrated, child development perspective. Accessible higher education training with a focus on children under six is most likely to be found in the community college system and a few private colleges (Morgan et al., 1993).

129. It is interesting to note that in all European Union countries (except Germany and Austria), staff who work as lead teachers in the main forms of publicly-funded early childhood institutions are trained at the tertiary level in higher education institutions (following a minimum of 12 years compulsory schooling). This decision to raise the academic level of training dates back in some cases to the 1960s (e.g. U.K.), in some to the 1970s (e.g. Sweden), in some to the 1980s (e.g. Greece). The focal point of the three or four year long courses varies. In some it is a broad-based training for work with children of all ages (e.g. in Denmark), in others for work with children in the two or three years preceding compulsory schooling (e.g. in Belgium or Greece), and again in others for work with children from birth up to compulsory schooling (Sweden, Finland). Whatever the explicit focus, both a high formal level of education and a field-relevant knowledge base and professional training are considered essential ingredients for preparing staff to work in posts of responsibility with young children. At the same time, various approaches are being developed towards creating a more flexible, modularised system to meet the diverse needs of ECEC trainees, and to keep access open in terms of entry-level positions.

130. One of the recommendations of the *Not by Chance* report (1997) was to consider multiple approaches to organising staff and children. The report raises the question not only of staff training requirements, but also of staff/child ratios, referring to examples of higher child/adult ratios in other countries (p.16). It would seem that research is necessary to gain more evidence and insight into these dimensions of ECEC provision in the USA. Also, we were told that no research studies have as yet focussed on the content of training courses, and that here much more detail is needed in order to be able to compare the different kinds and levels of training with one another. Preparing staff to work with an increasingly diverse population of children and families is an issue which up to now has had only scant attention in many of the training courses offered. This is a challenge for those who develop early childhood coursework, particularly if they are to make an intercultural perspective an interwoven thread in all components of training.

131. In the case of continuing or in-service training, most states agencies have links with community colleges. However, only in a few states is there a certain amount of consistency in the kinds of in-service education offered. Generally, there is no common framework between states as to how community colleges should contribute towards an overall system of in-service training, and there are no overarching goals, programmes, or implementation strategies. There are no clearly stated within-state or across-state requirements within a conceptual framework that could be described as 'lifelong learning'.

132. The introduction of measures to retain staff appears to be one of the challenges for the years to come. In the present situation—high economy, low unemployment—it is particularly difficult to attract workers to an occupational field with minimal wages and few benefits. The staffing crisis illustrates in a most dramatic way that child care is not perceived as a necessary public service, that it is not valued by society at large, and that priorities lie elsewhere. We were told that most workers are not organised in a union, although in cases where they are involved (e.g. Massachusetts), a number of wage initiatives have been effective. There are also gross inequities not only between systems, but even within delivery systems (for example between state-employed staff in pre-kindergartens and those working in kindergartens).

133. There is no articulation within states and across delivery systems concerning caregiver/teacher qualifications or how qualifications could dovetail into one another. Again, it is the professional associations (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)) who have taken the lead in encouraging training institutions to develop a conceptual framework for a coherent teacher preparation programme. Only a few states, e.g. Ohio, have made state-wide efforts to improve articulation between and across systems. The Early Childhood Education Office of the Ohio Department of Education has introduced a step-by-step scheme which is currently being implemented in a number of counties: first to clarify which staff are to be classified as 'teachers' and develop a career pathway with the help of the NAEYC model;

second, to identify the core component of the base level; third, to identify the training necessary to entering the career path at any one specific point; and fourth, to establish a register to guarantee quality. All these steps are seen as moves in the direction of securing a place for ECEC professionalism on the political agenda. In New York and Connecticut, too, professional development experts have identified and reached state-wide consensus on core knowledge or core competencies with a view to achieving articulation agreements. These are very important steps for the occupational field. We heard repeatedly that there is considerable political resistance against establishing a 'profession' of early childhood practitioners. The potential effect such a move would have on costs for the general public is still apparently considered to be a political risk.

Images of children—children's rights

134. As in all countries, public discourse around the topic of early childhood education and care in the U.S. is dominated by specific views about children, about the role of families in society, and about the respective contributions of mothers and fathers towards young children's upbringing. ECEC policies reflect these—mainly implicit—assumptions. The public policy focus on 'children at risk' is essentially a deficit-oriented approach. One of the major motives for helping at-risk populations appears to be that of influencing future 'outcomes'—of being ready for school, ready for reading, successful in school, successful in later life. In the words of one of the presenters at an early childhood conference we attended, the aim of improving child care quality is to achieve "a healthier, more productive society and a more productive workforce." While these may be legitimate goals within an overall educational vision, if seen to the exclusion of other dimensions they are in danger of being interpreted in a purely utilitarian manner, both in a philosophical and pedagogical sense. They are located in a conceptual framework of 'becoming' rather than of 'being', of 'being prepared' and 'redressing deficits' rather than of 'strengthening the child as a person in his/her own right'. An alternative approach would be to see *all* young children as having a right to high quality education from an early age, regardless of socio-economic status or ethnic origin.

135. Another pervading assumption seems to be that the education and upbringing of young children is a private affair and not a public responsibility, that parents inherently know and are in a position to offer what is 'best' for young children. However, most young children today grow up in families where participation in the labour force is an integral part of their parents' lives. They grow up communities that are becoming more and more dominated by the older generation. Many grow up in small family units, with maybe only one adult and no siblings at home, and few peers in the immediate neighbourhood. Many grow up in urban environments which prohibit freedom of movement. These are some of the many reasons for making sure that there is a well-resourced infrastructure for young children and their families, one which both stimulates children's interests and offers them a stable framework for building relationships with other children, one which also helps families in their parenting task and enables parents to build their own supportive networks. The whole question of responsibility for children's upbringing needs to become the focus of nation wide debate in order to develop solutions which will be supported by the broad population of the U.S. Early childhood services play a central role in this debate.

136. A notion of the 'here and now' of childhood, of children as an independent population group to be considered in relation to other groups in the population, was one of the 'missing links' in the lines of argumentation we heard—even from the most committed of advocates of high quality early education and care. Discussed along these lines, the issue of children's rights arises. However, this is an issue which seems to be of marginal importance. From an outside perspective, it is hard to understand why the U.S. is now the only country apart from Somalia not to have ratified the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the whole, ECEC policy initiatives have been driven by external forces, such as getting young mothers into the labour market. We are concerned that the child's perspective and acknowledged right to

have a fair start in life should be taken more explicitly into consideration when considering future policy developments.

Child poverty and diversity

137. Not only are the child poverty rates in the U.S. among the highest in the industrialised countries, but young children in the U.S. are more likely to live in poverty than any other age group in the population. The team was concerned about these high rates of child poverty, as well as the relationship between family income and children's opportunities to benefit from quality early learning experiences. Data for 1997 show that for children under age six, poverty rates are highest for African-American children (40%) and Latino children (38%). As noted above, research shows that children from low-income families are less likely than their higher-income counterparts to participate in ECEC. We know that participation in quality ECEC provision can mediate some of the long-term effects of poverty on children's development and learning, yet even when children from low-income families do participate in ECEC, they often do not receive the full range of child development, health, and parent services that are needed to optimise school readiness (Galinsky et al., 1994; US General Accounting Office, 1995). For equity reasons, it seems to the review team that the issues of child poverty and low-income families' barriers to accessing quality ECEC need to be addressed urgently.

138. A related equity issue concerns cultural and ethnic diversity in early childhood settings. During the many site visits, the OECD observed that many of the programmes served predominately one particular ethnic group. In the Head Start groups we visited, for example, the greater majority of the child population was African-American, whereas in much of the fee-paying purchase-of-service provision serving higher-income families, children were predominantly white. Also, in public school provision targeting low-income groups, many children were African-American and of Hispanic origin, whereas in the for-profit, employer-sponsored child care chains most children were white. We were told that the racial composition of centres and classrooms is largely determined by patterns of residence and housing policy rather than by policies of early childhood programmes or agencies (i.e. the recruitment of income-eligible families reflects the racial composition in that particular area). What we were in fact witnessing was an unintended system of segregation both by income and by ethnicity. Of course, we do not know if what we saw was representative. However, if this is the case, and if the pursuit of democratic values is to be anchored in a vision of 'lifelong learning', if the many programmatic position papers produced by professional organisations and experts urging greater attention to issues of cultural and linguistic diversity in the early years are to be heeded, this is a policy issue which needs to be addressed.

139. What we also observed in our many site visits was that programme content and transmission in the Head Start and other 'at risk' groups tended to be very structured (an 'instructivist' curriculum approach), whereas a number of the fee-paying purchase-of-service programmes serving primarily white children were based along 'constructivist' lines (cf.. section on programme content and curriculum in Chapter 4). While acknowledging that these observations can not necessarily be generalised, they nevertheless provoke a number of questions, e.g. Does this mean that different groups of children are acquiring different sets of competencies? And if this is the case, could this mean that some groups are more successful and more sought after in a future workforce?

Child-rearing, gender issues, and parental leave

140. As in many countries, child-rearing still (despite the decades of 'equality of opportunity' initiatives) seems to be considered a 'woman's issue' by decision-makers in the policy field. It is women who are bearing the burden of balancing the workload between family and workplace. However, this fact was not explicitly mentioned during our visit. There does not appear to be much public discussion about the role of fathers—as an issue it does not overtly feature in early childhood programme orientations or in policy initiatives. However, it is vital to get men as fathers, as representatives of the business community, and as decision-makers to become more involved in creating public awareness about ECEC policy concerns. In addition, 'family-friendly' workplace policies are needed which respect the fact that both mothers and fathers with young children need a work environment that is sympathetic to the needs of young parents, e.g. by supporting regular visits by parents to child care centres, by developing more generous policies concerning maternal and paternal leave and for looking after sick children, and also by being supportive when parents wish to make use of their statutory leave rights.

141. In the U.S., there is no federally mandated, paid maternal or parental leave. Both mothers and fathers are granted three months *unpaid* leave following childbirth. Otherwise, parents' own private circumstances and the attitude of their workplace towards parental leave determine whether they are able to stay at home longer with their very young child. Only in five states (covering about one quarter of the total workforce) is paid leave available through statutory short-term disability insurance. Despite this extraordinary situation—at least compared with European countries—parental leave as a supportive measure for young families (and in particular for lone mothers), and as one solution towards improving the present crisis concerning the care of very young infants, did not feature in discussions when we asked for policy suggestions. In all member countries of the European Union, maternity leave for between three to four months is statutory and paid, generally at a high proportion of current earnings. Furthermore, all member states have parental leave of at least three months per parent. In most countries, there are systems of payment for parents taking leave, but these tend to be at a low level of payment. Minimal standards on maternity and parental leave are set by European Union Directives, which are binding for member states.

142. However, in our discussions, there was little mention of parental leave as one of major alternatives towards improving the ECEC system in the United States, and of giving parents a real choice between staying at home to care for very young children or making use of public services for this purpose. On the contrary, if we brought the topic up, it tended to be dismissed as a utopian vision. In the words of a business representative involved in one of the state-wide early childhood initiatives: "It's a pipe dream."

CHAPTER 6: POLICY IMPLICATIONS FROM A REVIEW TEAM PERSPECTIVE

143. ECEC policies and related issues need to be understood contextually. Within the current framework and interplay of social, cultural, economic, political and historical factors, ECEC policy developments in the USA in recent years have been significant. Through the support of public awareness campaigns, an articulate advocacy community, and internationally-renown research, early childhood education and care has secured a place on the political agenda. There has been a marked increase in political commitment and investment both at the federal and state levels, with concomitant expansion of funding and coverage of ECEC provision. Likewise, numerous state initiatives have developed to address the question of quality, and there have been significant improvements in regulations for in-service training. However, the U.S. still faces the simultaneous challenges of both expanding provision and raising the quality of services. This is an enormous task, and there is still much to be done in order to capitalise on and to stabilise present policy initiatives. We should like to start this chapter by outlining some perceived strengths of U.S. policies and practices upon which future efforts could build. Subsequently, a number of suggestions for policy goal-setting are made, summarising some of the specific issues for policy attention which could help to move the agenda forward.

Building on the strengths of U.S. policies and practices

144. We witnessed an abundance of collaborative initiatives and innovative practices, particularly at the local level, a remarkable array of energising forces intent on improving the overall situation of young children and their families. Here lie some of the most obvious strengths of U.S. practices. For example, the North Carolina Partnership for Children's initiative SMART START has generated a most impressive and forward-looking engagement and collaboration between state government and a wide range of partners at the community level. This is a comprehensive public-private initiative which provides both a framework for pooling resources and for targeting planning to meet the needs of children and families in different localities. Its mixed-market philosophy fits in well with prevailing views held by many U.S. policy-makers and business representatives. There is widespread acceptance—at least among certain sections of the population—for these partnership systems, for community-based, bottom-up bridge-building and networking strategies. There also appears to be an acceptance of the fact that 'money has to be raised' even if valuable time that could be spent with children is devoted to fund-raising. The spirit of entrepreneurship is tangible, exemplified in the EDUCARE COLORADO initiative. Set up in 1997, it is a wholly private coalition without any public funding support, a co-operative venture between business, philanthropic, political and community leaders. Politically, Educare Colorado's strategies link into the Colorado Early Childhood Summit, a co-operative initiative at board level which brings together both government agencies and NGOs. It enables different organisations and agencies involved in early childhood policy and advocacy to speak with one voice when it comes to legislative issues.

145. Of the three states we visited, Ohio appears to have taken the most far-reaching steps towards creating a state-wide *systemic* approach towards developing ECEC policies, with FAMILY AND CHILDREN FIRST councils in each of the state's 88 counties. This kind of decentralised policy-making structure—with institutionalised links to government agencies—would seem to be an important way of both capitalising on local resources and ensuring that an overall regulatory structure is in place to sustain

and develop quality services. An important policy link in this set up has been the creation of a strong Early Childhood Office within the state Department of Education. Another important feature revolves around combining government support with the expertise of philanthropic organisations committed to reforming the ECEC system, such as the Sisters of Charity Foundation in Ohio.

146. There are two additional strengths worth mentioning. First, the review team was impressed with the efforts being made towards developing and implementing a wide spectrum of evaluative procedures, approaches aimed at improving the quality of work at the individual, programme, and regional level. Second, there is tremendous diversity of provision in the U.S.: there is room for parental choice, for creating an unlimited number of programmes, for adhering to a wide range of philosophies, for involving parents in participatory strategies. As long as appropriate safeguards against inequities are assured, this diversity is a healthy and worthwhile aspect of early childhood provision.

Some suggestions for policy goal-setting

147. Despite the excellent work that is being done in these various efforts, we received the impression that these initiatives are not widespread in the U.S., and that they have not received the nation-wide recognition due to them. There seems to be a need for mechanisms to support these initiatives, to make them durable, and to disseminate lessons from these experiences across the country. In order to increase the chances of sustaining and nourishing regional partnerships (which are all based on voluntary participation), an agreed infrastructure and with clear policy goals and implementation plans is necessary. What is needed is an *overall vision* of quality education and care in the early years, a co-ordinated policy framework to draw together these varied approaches and use them to the best advantage of young children and their families. From an OECD review team perspective, some of the following suggestions for policy goal-setting may help to move the debate forward.

Creating a comprehensive, co-ordinated and stable system of early childhood education and care

148. In order to improve policy and provision for young children, it is essential for the U.S. to make a clear policy commitment and investment priority to early childhood education and care. Setting clear policy goals and devising strategies for the implementation and evaluation of these goals are government tasks—both at the federal and the state level. How these roles are shared, and how they should link up with private initiatives, is most certainly a subject for debate. There does not appear to be any clear agreement on this issue, particularly on the role of federal government. There seems to be a need for consensus building on the relative roles of the federal, state and local governments, and for creating a network of interagency partnerships in order to help build a sustainable within-state and across-state system. A national commission to discuss and put forward suggestions on redefining the government role in ECEC could be an effective step towards achieving this goal.

149. Just recently there has been considerable discussion around the issue of shifting responsibility for Head Start from the federal to the state level. Although this would seem to be a logical goal for the future, we are not in a position to judge how effective devolution would be, in light of the inequities between states concerning vision and commitment towards ECEC provision as a whole. From its inception during the anti-poverty movement, Head Start programme has been a federally-funded programme grounded in a local base of community action. It is critical not to lose these elements should responsibility be transferred from the federal to state level.

150. With regard to policy co-ordination, policies and funding at the federal level are entrusted to a range of government departments—Education, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, and so on. At the state level, too, different agencies are responsible for different sections of ECEC policy. While in some cases there is targeted co-ordination (e.g. on the quality of programmes receiving 'child care dollars'), more often, responsibility is split. Analyses of European ECEC systems emphasise the advantages of pooling resources and responsibilities for children from birth up to compulsory school age under the auspices of *one* government department. In some cases this is Education (as in Sweden and Spain), in others Social Welfare (as in Denmark and Finland). An inter-departmental policy framework and co-ordinating board at the federal level could be a first step toward establishing greater coherence of policy.

151. Not only are different government departments involved, but they also focus on different age groups. Broadly speaking, where there is provision under the responsibility of Education, it is for children from the age of four upwards. Where there is publicly-supported provision for younger children, it tends to come under the auspices of Health and/or Human Services. However, what is really needed for young children and families is an integrated approach to education, care, health and well-being, and family support, one that provides a clear infrastructure and which at the same time is flexible enough to accommodate community needs and strengths. A 'Department of Services for Children and Families' that brings together education, child care, health, and family support could be an answer towards improving co-ordination and integration of services. In sum, it would seem essential that the U.S. move away from a programmatic approach to a *systemic* approach towards ECEC policy-making so that ECEC policies are stable enough to withstand changes of government and political leadership, and are not just dependent on a strong economy.

Adopting a more universal approach through collaboration with public education

152. Improving access to ECEC is one of the most urgent issues in the U.S. Stronger intervention by the education authorities is seen by many experts as an essential step toward creating a more equitable system with broad public support. Neither the U.S. Department of Education nor most of the state-level education agencies have given ECEC high priority or visibility up to now. However, more commitment in terms of policy goals and implementation would highlight the importance of ECEC and raise the status of the field generally in the public eye. Ohio is a pioneer in the field, being the first state to have established (nine years ago) an Early Childhood Office within the state Department of Education. Today, it remains one of the few states to have such a Division specialising in ECEC policies. One of the many challenges ahead centres around the issue of involving education agencies in extending provision for universal access—without subjecting early childhood services to heavy bureaucracy and standardising procedures and without limiting educational goals to a narrow view of 'school readiness'.

153. While a leading role by the education authorities may be one way of creating a co-ordinated and stable ECEC system, capitalising on the strong spirit of local initiative and free enterprise, could also be another policy option. This would entail, for example, the establishment of stable networks of inter-agency partnerships at the state level in order to help build a sustainable within-state and across-state system. It would also mean setting up an institutionalised form (e.g. committee, board) of inter-agency co-ordination at the local level, of creating linkages which would guarantee that certain groups of children do not 'fall through the net'. There is a critical need for increased supply-side funding to the full range of providers in exchange for guarantees of improved access and quality. This direct funding could be supplemented by strengthening demand-side subsidies to make programmes more affordable for middle- and low-income families. Other options could be to use the local networks and strategies which the Head Start approach has

developed over the years and expand these to include sufficient full-day services for all groups of the population. The ECEC system adopted by the U.S. Armed Services could also be used as a model for nation-wide consideration.

154. All these approaches would involve a thorough review of the present 'at risk' policy orientation and substantial public investment to raise quality and ensure expansion of services. There is also a need to reform publicly-funded provision in order to adapt it to the multiple needs of young children and their families. Issues for consideration include the need to integrate services such that they serve a wider age group than just four and five year olds, extending the number of full-day and extended-day places, and supporting forms of combined provision (e.g. pre-kindergartens with wrap-around, on-site care facilities). At the same time parental choice could be assured by introducing new public-private subsidy mechanisms to support established, high-quality private, non-profit/for-profit centres and family child care providers. With a more universal approach, the issue of programme quality is then shared by all kinds of families, and is no longer a low priority issue disproportionally affecting one disadvantaged section of the population.

Taking a proactive stance towards child poverty and diversity

155. Attention to income distribution policies should be considered so as to eliminate the worst examples of child and family poverty, which research shows as having an extremely negative impact on child development and later educational achievement. In addition, ensuring that policies do not create (unintended) segregation in early childhood services is an important issue from the reviewers' perspectives. This would mean looking at ECEC-related policy areas, such as housing policy, which tends to support segregation of families by income and also by ethnic origin. Furthermore, employment policies within the ECEC field should ensure that the workers employed reflect the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the children they serve. Whereas there is some evidence that family child care providers come closest to matching the children they serve, there is least diversity among public school practitioners. It is therefore important to ensure that a career lattice makes it possible for a wide range of trainees from different ethnic and social groups to enter the system. Another important issue centres around helping practitioners to understand and build on the rich diversity of cultures in their everyday work by integrating an intercultural dimension into all components of initial training and ongoing training, as well as ensuring that programmes are supported in their attempts to meet the needs of children with limited proficiency in the English language.

Creating an effective staff training and professional development system

156. Well-educated and well-trained staff are a key component of high quality ECEC system. In order to support the goal of a co-ordinated system of ECEC which is affordable for all families and thus accessible for all children, staffing issues demand increased attention. First, it would be important to establish an agreed national framework of early childhood certification across the present mixed-sector delivery system, including family day care providers (e.g. through the introduction of a three-year degree at tertiary level as the basic qualification for staff with group responsibility in early childhood centres, with different entry points). Second, a review of the knowledge base of pre-service training programmes is essential, ensuring that this includes key competencies for meeting the multiple needs of an increasingly diverse population of children and families (e.g. parent participation and support, cultural competence, working with infants and toddlers and children with special needs, observing children and developing sensitive approaches towards assessing children).

157. Third, the structure and content of continuing training need to accommodate a nationally-recognised, articulated career lattice—a system for moving vertically and horizontally within an established path, based on different starting points. Again, attention to the training needs of family child care providers is important. As the ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of U.S. children become more diverse, it is essential that efforts are made to recruit a workforce that reflects this diversity. Fourth, in order to attract and retain well-qualified staff, a radical reassessment of the compensation and benefit systems for early childhood workers is needed, as are public awareness measures to raise the public image and status of this occupational field. Raising compensation and ensuring that staff receive health and leave benefits (e.g., similar to the benefits to which others in public service are entitled) are two of the more obvious solutions. Organising early childhood workers into unions is another option. Comparative studies of qualifications systems in different states would illuminate strengths and weaknesses and raise awareness of the importance of practitioner qualifications.

158. We were told that staff licensing is a controversial issue within the occupational group. However, it is considered by experts to be one of key ways of raising both the quality of staffing and of the system as a whole. The *Not by Chance* report (1997) states four basic rationales for licensing practitioners: (1) to prevent harm to children and assure the quality of programmes; (2) to increase the recognition and rewards for early childhood workers, to establish work in early childhood settings as a profession, with a set of specified skills, a discrete body of knowledge, and a set of ethics; (3) to facilitate training coherence and co-ordination as well as career mobility; (4) to make facility licensing more cost-efficient. Reform suggestions call for a three-tier set of licenses: for early childhood administrators; for early childhood educators; and for early childhood associate educators. To the OECD team, this is a suggestion which seems to make sense.

Introducing paid parental leave

159. Alongside these suggested measures to extend and enhance the system of early childhood education and care outside the home, support for employed parents to stay at home during the first year or so of their child's life is also an essential component of a modern ECEC system. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is an important first step, but many new parents are not able to take advantage of the leave because it is unpaid. Examining different approaches, first towards funding paid *maternity* leave for at least one year after the child's birth, and subsequently towards supporting paid parental leave (i.e. leave for mothers and fathers either as an individual right or as a choice for the two to decide how to use) would be essential steps towards a much-needed policy commitment to family support. Giving states the resources and flexibility to develop creative new approaches to financing paid leave (as proposed by the Clinton administration) may generate some useful national models to creating a paid leave system. Finally, for equity reasons, it is important that the FMLA (and any related legislation) entitles all workers to take leave, not just those who work in businesses with over 50 employees.

Creating a stable research framework and a long-term research agenda

160. Researching key policy goal areas is an essential element of a continuous improvement process. Setting up a strong, sustained national research enterprise demands a permanent government funding base for research and evaluation combined with a long-term research agenda and generous training (fellowship) opportunities. Creating a stable research framework would help inform effective policy-making and raise the overall quality of early childhood education and care.

161. *Establishing a reliable statistical knowledge base:* According to experts in the field, there are major information gaps, particularly at the state level, concerning reliable estimates of the number of programmes available nationwide, the number of places available in each type of programme, the characteristics of these programmes, and the indicators of quality by type of programme. Other categories of basic data needed include the numbers of children of different ages in different types of settings as well as a total figure for the percentage of cohort in out-of-home care. Although there is considerable research data available at the national level, there is a need for a systematic procedure designed to provide consistent and comparable information on ECEC across the country. Establishing on-going national data collection on the status of America's young children and the programmes that serve them is an issue that needs to be looked at from the view of federal leadership and responsibility.

162. *Expanding the research agenda:* Given the issues highlighted in this report, areas for future research might include the following: (1) Children's social worlds: The concerns and methodologies of developmental psychology have traditionally played a dominant role in ECEC research, while studies on the sociology of childhood which look closely at the many and very different conditions under which children grow up, play a relatively minor part. A stronger research focus on the diverse worlds of childhood in the U.S., on children's views of the world, and on descriptions of children's daily routines would help to deepen adults' perceptions and understandings of children and their social networks. (2) Learning environments: Studies focussing on process quality in different learning environments would provide valuable data and help states to gauge priorities when setting up and raising the quality of services. Some leading questions could be: How can very young children best be helped to develop life-coping and school-coping competencies? What balance is needed between child-initiated and adult-led activities? How do practitioners best assess if they are achieving the goals they set? How do different approaches towards language and literacy development influence children's proficiency? (3) Structural elements: There is also but also a need for research to explore the structural parameters of a quality ECEC system, in terms of regulation, governance, training, funding, etc.

163. *Developing sensitive research instruments and evaluation procedures:* Measurement, outcomes, and accountability are given high priority in the U.S., and many of the instruments for assessing 'child outcomes' tend still today to have a cognitive emphasis. Supporting the development of research instruments and procedures that are more sensitive to the complex dynamics of early childhood environments, to the interdependence between family beliefs and practices and centre beliefs and practices, would be an important step towards deepening understanding in these areas. Research based on self-evaluation procedures would support critical self-reflection and team development as a complement to external evaluation.

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164. The USA is a rich and influential country, with the resources to successfully meet the needs of young children and their families. Yet, compared with other advanced industrialised societies, the USA lacks a coherent ECEC policy framework. What is needed is the creation of an overall, sustainable system, one which acknowledges that early childhood education and care is a public responsibility, and one which generates and deploys funding sources which support community initiatives. It is our hope that some of our analyses and suggestions may contribute to making this policy, public, and financial commitment a reality.

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APPENDIX I: OECD REVIEW TEAM

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APPENDIX II: INFORMATION ON THE USA BACKGROUND REPORT

The USA Background Report was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). The individual chapters were prepared by subject experts.

Section I: Definitions, Context, and Provision

Section IIa: Policy Concerns -- Quality

Section IIb: Access to ECEC Programs

Section IIIa: Regulatory Policy In The United States

Section IIIb: Staffing

Section IIIc: Program Content and Implementation

Section IIId: Family Engagement and Support

Section IIIe: Funding Issues for Early Care and Education in the United States

Section IV: Evaluation and Research

Section V: Concluding Comments and Assessments

APPENDIX III: PROGRAMME OF THE REVIEW VISIT

26 September to 8 October 1999

Sunday 26 September

Washington, DC

18h00 - 20h00
Dinner Meeting Key Bridge Marriott, Lincoln Room (3rd fl)
Attendees: Naomi Karp, Carol Rasco, Joan Lombardi, Sheila Kamerman, Richard Clifford, Lynn Kagan, Victoria Fu, Mon Cochran, and others.

Monday 27 September

9h30
Delegation arrives at 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW OERI offices--met by Naomi Karp

10h00 - 12h00
Discussion with representatives from Title I, Even Start, Special Education, Indian Education, and Bilingual Education. Group will also be visited by Kent McGuire, Assistant Secretary, US Department of Education, OERI.

12h15 - 13h30
Lunch with representatives from Health and Human Services (HHS)

13h30 - 14h30
Visit to new child care centre funded jointly by HHS and Education

15h00
Travel to Raleigh-Durham joined by Mon Cochran, Ann Segal, Martha Moorehouse

19h30
Delegation arrives at The Clifford home in Chapel Hill and will be joined for dinner by Don Bailey, Donna Bryant, Jim Gallagher, Karen Ponder, Sean Doig, and others

Tuesday 28 September

North Carolina

Person in charge: Dick Clifford

9h00 - 11h00
Observe programs—group will divide into two subgroups and visit various programs in the Chapel Hill area

12h00
Delegation arrives in Raleigh at the NC Partnership for Children
Brief Presentation on Smart Start

12h30 - 13h45
Lunch and Discussion on early care and education in NC
joined by NC Partnership for Children representatives, government officials

14h00 - 15h15
Observe programs—group will divide into two subgroups and observe one program each in the Raleigh area.

15h30
Travel to Charlotte

Wednesday 29 September

Person in charge: Dick Clifford
Local Organisers: Ellen Edmonds, Charlotte/Mecklenburg Schools
& Janet Singerman, Child Care Resource & Information

8h00 - 11h00
Observe Bright Beginnings programs in the public schools and private settings

11h30
Lunch in the Family Resource Centre joined by local officials

13h00 - 17h00
Observe programs—group will divide into two subgroups and observe two sites each: for profit and non-profit locations

Delegation meets in evening to debrief

Thursday 30 September

Colorado

Person in charge: Mary Culkin

13h15
Travel to Denver with Mary Culkin and Nancy Weaver

14h00
Proceed to Early education and care programs
PROGRAM 1. Mile High Child Care Centers
PROGRAM 2. Sewell Child Development Center

15h45
Complete the visit and depart for the Clayton Campus

16h00
Presentation from representatives of various Colorado organisations:
Colorado Office of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, Educare Colorado Inc., Clayton Foundation, representatives of the business community

17h30
Leave the Clayton Campus for the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, School of Nursing for reception.

18h00 - 19h30
Reception and hors d'oeuvres at The University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, School of Nursing, School of Nursing Dean's Conference Room, Guests from various state and local agencies

Friday 1 October

Person in charge: Mary Culkin

7h30 - 9h00
Breakfast at Embassy Suites Hotel
Guests joining for breakfast. Higher Education in Colorado: Representatives of the community college system, college system, and university system

09h15 - 10h30
PROGRAM 1 Visit Clayton Center Programs
PROGRAM 2 A family child care home

10h45 - 11h45
PROGRAM Denver Indian Center

11h45 - 12h45
Visit to La Petite Center

12h45 - 13h45
Lunch in Lafayette

14h00 - 15h00
PROGRAM 1 Friends and Fun Early Childhood Program
PROGRAM 2 Church or municipality-based child care centre

15h30 - 18h00
Visit programs in Boulder

PROGRAM 1: University of Colorado Housing Program Child Care Center
PROGRAM 2 National Institute of Science and Technology (NIST) (Formerly Bureau of Standards); Commerce Children's Center Child Care Center (A public employee sponsored child care centre.)

18h15 - 19h30
Hotel Boulderado - Reception with government representatives from Boulder and Denver County

Sunday 3 October

Ohio

Person in charge: Jane Wiechel

15h00
Delegation arrives Columbus

17h30 - 21h00
Reception with State Agency Directors

Monday 4 October

Person in charge: Jane Wiechel

Local organiser: Joni Close, Sisters of Charity

7h00
Depart to Stark County

10h00
Begin site visits: public school; Head Start; church-based; family child care; co-ordinated professional development program; corporate child care

18h00
Dinner with local and municipal officials and representatives from higher education

23h00
Return to hotel

Tuesday 5 October

Person in charge: Jane Wiechel

7h30
Breakfast at Action for Children with organisation representatives and community leaders

8h30
Attend ***Help Me Grow***, the Governor and First Lady's Conference on Early Child Development

11h30
Lunch with medical and business community

13h00
Afternoon Observe programs
GROUP 1. School-based Head Start; MR/DD pre-school centre
GROUP 2. Early Start; Nisonger (assessment centre); 2 home visits

18h00
Dinner

Wednesday 6 October

Person in charge: Jane Wiechel

7h30
Breakfast at the Ohio Department of Education; meet the Early Childhood staff

9h00
Visit Lincoln Park Elementary School (Reggio inspired classroom & Head Start in public school) and The Ohio State University Lab School

12h00
Lunch at hotel

13h30
Depart for Washington, DC

Thursday 7 October

Washington, DC

Person in charge: Donna Hinkle, Dept. of Education

11h00
Discussion with Advocacy Groups - NAEYC, CDF, NCBDI, Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, etc. Continue meeting through lunch

Afternoon
Meetings & Wrap Up

18h00
Dinner Meeting of Delegation (joined by Victoria Fu)

Friday 8 October

8h00 - 12h00
Delegation meeting followed by debriefing at the US Department of Education